

# **My Older Brother's Tree**

## **Everyday Violence and the Question of the Ordinary in Batticaloa, Eastern Sri Lanka**

**Rebecca Walker**



Images of Batticaloa 2005-6

**PhD. The University of Edinburgh. 2010**

## **Declaration**

I declare that the thesis has been entirely composed by me and is my own original work and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Date:



# Table of Contents

Declaration .....	i
List of Figures and Maps.....	iv
List of Abbreviations.....	vi
Dedication .....	ix
Acknowledgements .....	x
Abstract.....	xiii
 <b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	 <b>1</b>
1.1 Present Realities, Everyday Lives.....	2
1.2 Mapping the Landscape.....	5
1.3 Unexpected Tragedies .....	12
1.4 Stories of Movement and Change.....	20
1.5 Catching up with the Present .....	25
1.6 Taking a Stand .....	29
1.7 Structure of the Thesis .....	34
 <b>CHAPTER TWO: LIVING AND LEARNING IN BATTICALOA.....</b>	 <b>36</b>
2.1 From the Beginning: Locating Myself with Others .....	39
2.2 Social Relationships and Ties that Bind.....	46
2.3 Insider-Outsider .....	51
2.4 Permeable Boundaries between Self and Other .....	59
2.5 Learning to Know what Not to Know .....	64
 <b>CHAPTER THREE: MEENA’S STORY.....</b>	 <b>69</b>
3.1 Part One: Growing up in Kokkodaichcholai.....	71
3.2 Part Two: Widowhood and Occupation of the East.....	89
3.3 Part Three: Making Ends Meet .....	104
 <b>CHAPTER FOUR: THREADS OF REALITY AND UNRAVELLING HISTORY .....</b>	 <b>118</b>
4.1 Whose History? Official Histories and Tracing the Past .....	121
4.2 Questions of History and Narrative .....	124
4.3 Eastern Sri Lanka: A Present Moment in History.....	129
4.4 Ambiguous Meanings .....	141
 <b>CHAPTER FIVE: BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND THE EVERYDAY: QUESTIONS OF THE ORDINARY.....</b>	 <b>146</b>
5.1 Violence, the Everyday and ‘Everyday Violence’ .....	149
5.2 The Enactment of the Everyday .....	157
5.3 The (Un)remarkable Ordinary .....	162
 <b>CHAPTER SIX: “KUTTI ANNAR MARAM” (MY OLDER BROTHER’S TREE).....</b>	 <b>167</b>
6.1 Rani’s Story.....	168
6.2 An Ordinary Beyond Routine .....	175

6.3 Maintaining an <i>Ordinary</i> Everyday .....	184
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>187</b>
7.1 Spaces of Mourning and Meaning .....	196
7.2 Ties of Relationships and Shaping Peace .....	200
7.3 Vocabulary and Vision: It's a matter of Language.....	203
7.4 In Light of New Beginnings .....	208
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY: .....</b>	<b>213</b>

## List of Figures and Maps

### MAPS

Map 1. Map of Sri Lanka .....	xv
Map 2. Map of administrative boundaries, Batticaloa .....	xvi
Map 3. Map of areas in Sri Lanka controlled by the government and the LTTE ...	xvii
Map 4. Map of Sri Lanka IDP population by district, Eastern Sri Lanka.....	xviii

### FIGURES

Figure 1. Lagoon side, Batticaloa (2005) .....	9
Figure 2. A woman sitting outside the remains of her Tsunami-destroyed home, Batticaloa (2005) .....	13
Figure 3. Batticaloa road (February 2005) .....	16
Figure 4. Batticaloa library next to army camp (February 2005) .....	16
Figure 5. Planning fieldwork, Batticaloa (2005).....	41
Figure 6. 'Buffel' armoured vehicle in Batticaloa (February 2005) .....	45
Figure 7. From a child's view, Batticaloa (2005) .....	58
Figure 8. Conversations with Meena (2006) .....	69
Figure 9. Sri Lankan army in Eastern Sri Lanka (2005) .....	89
Figure 10. Houses in an 'uncleared' area, Batticaloa district (2005).....	104
Figure 11. Temporary shelters in the East (March 2007) .....	146
Figure 12. A Karuna soldier guarding a checkpoint .....	161
Figure 13. Tree planting ceremony (2006) .....	172
Figure 14. <i>Kutti annar maram</i> .....	173
Figure 15. Surplus INGO boats, Batticaloa (June 2005).....	178
Figure 16. Bringing in the nets, Batticaloa fishermen (2005) .....	183

Figure 17. Returning to sea (January 2005) .....	186
Figure 18. Graffiti on a well in Tsunami-affected area, Batticaloa (2005). ....	190
Figure 19. Mothers in the <i>Valkai</i> group (2007) .....	208
Figure 20. Children playing in the sea, Batticaloa (2005) .....	212

## Abbreviations

AI	Amnesty International
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFP	Agence France-Presse
AGA	Additional Government Agent
BRC	British Red Cross
CIRM	Centre for Information and Resources Management
CFA	Ceasefire Agreement
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CPA	Centre for Policy Alternatives
CPO	Child Protection Officer
DS	Divisional Secretariat
ER	Emergency Regulations
ERO	Eastern Rehabilitation Organisation
EPDP	Eelam People's Democratic Party
EPRLF	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students
FCE	Foundation for Co-Existence
FP	Federal Party
GA	Government Agent
GN/CS	<i>Grama Niladhari/ Grama Sevaka</i> (lowest level government official)
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HSZ	High Security Zone
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICES	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross



IDP	Internally Displaced People
IDMC	International Displacement Monitoring Centre
INFORM	Information Monitor (Human Rights Organization)
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
JHU	<i>Jathika Hela Urumaya</i> - National Heritage Party
JVP	<i>Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna</i> - People's Liberation Front
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MBRL	Multi-barrel Rocket Launchers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NVA	National Unity Alliance
PA	People's Alliance
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
P-TOMS	Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing (India)
SLA	Sri Lankan Army
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLMM	Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
SLMM	Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission
SLRC	Sri Lankan Red Cross
STF	Special Task Force
SU	Sihala Urumaya
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization
TEA	Tamil Eelam Association
TMVP	<i>Tamil Makhal Viduthalai Pulikal</i> – Tamil People's Liberation Tigers
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
TRO	Tamil Rehabilitation Organization
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Childcare Fund
UNP	United National Party
UPFA	United People's Freedom Alliance
UTHR(J)	University Teachers of Human Rights (Jaffna)
WB	World Bank

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my Batticaloa family, A.H, SL, JT, S, VK and P, my parents, Caroline and Trevor Walker, to my friends who are no longer with us Meeto Malik (1978-2006), Sasi (1979-2005) and YH (1952-2006), and to all those in Sri Lanka who have lost their lives during the decades of conflict.

## Acknowledgements

And there were so many stories to tell, too many such as excess of intertwined lives, events, miracles, places, rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane!  
(Rushdie 1981: 4)

It is an understatement to say that this thesis has been a long time in the making. Over five years I have woven in my mind ideas about the kind of work that I wanted to write. However, the realization of it often seemed so far off, if not improbable. While I was at times enthusiastic, motivated and optimistic, at others, I was reluctant and uncertain of my ability to produce something that would do justice to my research and most importantly the lives of the people with whom I shared my time in Sri Lanka. This thesis is an attempt to adequately portray the everyday worlds of people, particularly women, in Batticaloa, who gave me far more than I could ever give back to them. I was extremely privileged to be a part of something so special and unique in that particular space and time in Eastern Sri Lanka. More than anything, my months of fieldwork were a learning experience, one in which I was able to share many small and wonderful moments as well as many tragic and painful ones. I learnt much about grief and hope, taught by those who lived through both, everyday. Invariably at times in this thesis, I will have made mistakes and unintentionally misrepresented situations. For this I can only apologize. However, providing that I do not increase the danger posed to those who already cope with risk on a daily basis in Sri Lanka then it is perhaps worth taking the risk.

It is thanks to so many people that I have been able to finish; people who have encouraged me throughout, cheered from the sidelines, and actively shoved me over the hurdles in order to reach the finishing line. There are many more people that I want to thank than I am able to name here and I am sure I will not remember everyone. Firstly, to my Batticaloa family – AH, S, P, JT, and SR - my time in the East would have never been the same without the rich experiences of life that you showed me. I don't think I have ever laughed, cried, and ached as much as during the months I shared your home and lives. You welcomed me in before you barely knew me and invested your time, spirit, and most of all courage in showing me where trust and hope can be found even in the darkest of experiences. Being a part of your family has left an indelible mark on me, and the sustenance of my experience has propelled me to move on and grow. Much of what I learnt from you is now embedded in the way that I see things and approach life and helps me to straddle the two worlds of Batticaloa and Edinburgh, that while so different are also both a part of me. AH – as a mother, friend, and teacher you

taught me more about patience, awareness and strength than anyone else I know. You seemed to always have the energy to fight the battles others couldn't and had the courage to look critically at what was closest to you. As I grew in awareness of my own vulnerabilities, I also learnt about the unwavering commitment of people like you who seemed to live so that others could too. By remaining real and true to the value of life you have done far more for others than you will ever know. Thank you to JT for keeping me laughing even through horrible times, to SR for being a great sister, and to P for doing a great job as a little brother. Michelle, - many gin and tonics, crackers and marmite, long road trips to Trinco and rescued cats later, you remain a fantastic friend. I also extend my thanks to all the *Valkai* people and those connected who included me in their networks and friendships, particularly Daniel, S and Y. To all the mothers, and the girls at the orphanage, especially Sinthu, thank you for investing time and trust in me, sharing your stories and looking after me as if your own. That you made yourself vulnerable in the most frightening of situations I owe my deepest gratitude. I also want to show my appreciation to Ira, Ammi, Ashwini, Indrankanthi, Audrey, Singham and all those who provided me with a home in Colombo. A special thank you to Uyan, who was responsible for kick-starting my PhD journey.

I am extremely grateful for the support and encouragement of my supervisors Prof. Jonathan Spencer and Prof. Tony Good, who have pushed and pulled me through this process and helped me believe in my own abilities. Writing up has also been made possible by my friends in Edinburgh, my family at home in Farnham and friends spread out across the globe. I owe huge amounts of thanks to my parents and siblings who have supported me in many ways through the fieldwork and writing up, especially Dad for all the proof reading and academic support and mum for the gentle encouragement and for being so strong and wise. Craig, you arrived at the most stressful time of this process and have kept me sane ever since. Thank you for putting up with all the stress, tears, frustration, and serious caffeine addiction. You have kept me laughing and loved throughout the last few months of writing. Thank you also to my fantastic friends who have always stuck by me especially, Sharika, Louise, KB, Kath (and little Ruby), Kerry, Vasuki, and many others. Dhana, Mihirini, Timmo and Nat have been through the PhD process alongside me and have provided invaluable intellectual and personal support, encouragement and empathy. Thanks also to Karen for the careful proof reading and helpful suggestions. A lot of thanks must also be extended to Gill, without the support, insight and wisdom of whom I could not have got to where I am now. Thank you for carrying my hope until I felt able to and for helping turn what felt impossible into an achievable process.

There are also many who have been a part of my life who did not managed to complete their journeys. Their memories have been with me throughout this and will always be so. To G. W



(1956–2007), your energy and enthusiasm was infectious and kept me laughing all the way to Trinco. You are much missed. To Y. H (1958-2006), your memory, like your sons lives on in the leaves and branches of *Kutti annar maram*; I hope that you now have the peace you were denied in the last years of your life. Finally to my friends Meeto (1978-2006) and Sasi (1979-2005), if only you could only have danced a while in someone else's shoes, then you would have seen yourselves for the beautiful young women you were.

## **Abstract**

Batticaloa district on the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka has been one of the most disrupted and devastated areas of the island since civil war began in the early 1980s. Ethnically and culturally diverse, the Eastern province has been under the control of different military actors, the Sri Lankan army, the Indian Peace-Keeping Forces, and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), however, none maintained full control of the Eastern areas until May 2009 when the Sri Lankan Army successfully defeated the LTTE. Exploring the lives of Tamil communities in Batticaloa, this thesis examines the ways in which people make sense of an 'everyday life' shaped by conflict. Following the idiosyncratic journey of the researcher through the uncertain environment of escalating conflict and the aftermath of the tsunami, it builds up a larger picture of life, moving between accounts of everyday violence and suffering and more sustained dwelling on the particular people who are actively making it possible to endure by investing in a more humane future. In areas such as Batticaloa, where violence frames the past, present and foreseeable future, resistance in some shape or form has become a way of life. As Foucault (1976, 2003) maintains, violence which is embedded in social and material structures can create an environment where power and control saturate the routines of the ordinary, making its existence appear 'normal'. However, from this way of life, what may emerge beyond the more obvious signs of violence, is the fact that people do keep pushing forward. Integral to this is the importance of risk, hope, and trust, which, woven through the interactions of daily activity, mark out what is possible and what is not. The chapters in this thesis, explore individuals who, in the spaces between accepted understandings of ordinary and extraordinary, work around the various controls and constraints to forge habitable spaces in which relations of trust and support can be strengthened and the future can be imagined.

Starting with a focus on the relationship between personal narrative and history, I trace the experiences of a woman living through poverty, displacement, and loss. From this I suggest that it is the paradoxical existence of violence, risk, fear, friendship, and trust as worked through the endurance of daily interactions that is integral to understanding the texture of everyday life. Therefore, I argue that what can on the one hand look like a hopeless and negative picture of militancy and violence, can also, contain within it, fragments of hope and survival, captured for example, in the work of local people to reclaim space.

I also deal with the complexities of the research experience in a violent environment and look at the strategies that people employ to negotiate and minimize risk in contested and militarized spaces. The second part of the thesis examines the meaning of the everyday and the ordinary through the experiences of a widow and group of fishermen, and thus challenges conventional academic writing which relates ‘normalcy’ in violence prone-areas to peace and productivity. Overall, these chapters argue that a capacity for hope, for building trust, safety, and peace, however fragile and tentative, is as much an integral part of a conflict situation as the more obvious capacity for fear and silence.

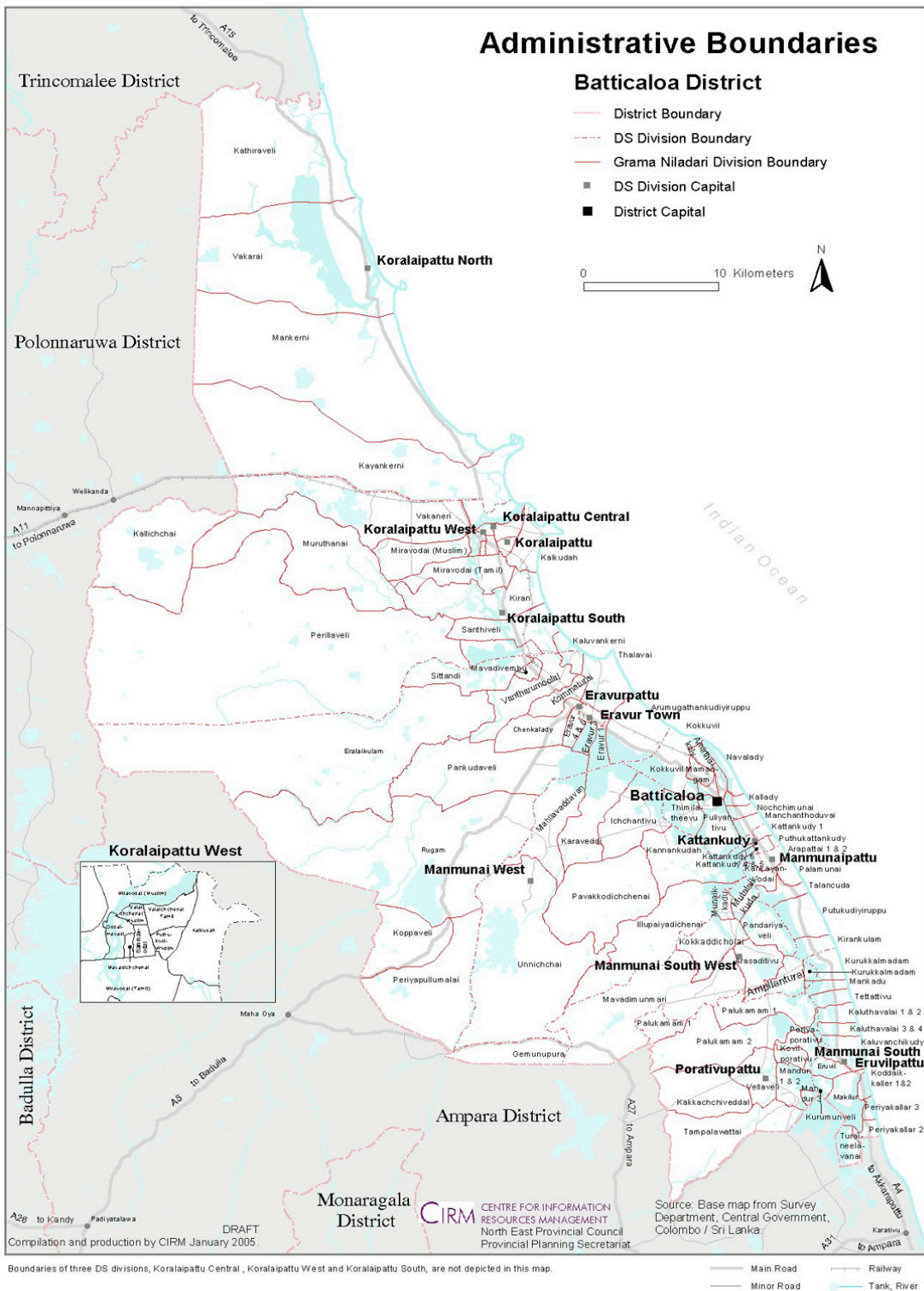
# Map of Sri Lanka



Map 1: Map of Sri Lanka (ICG 2007: 33)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scribd.com/doc/11131/srilanka>

## Map of the Batticaloa District.

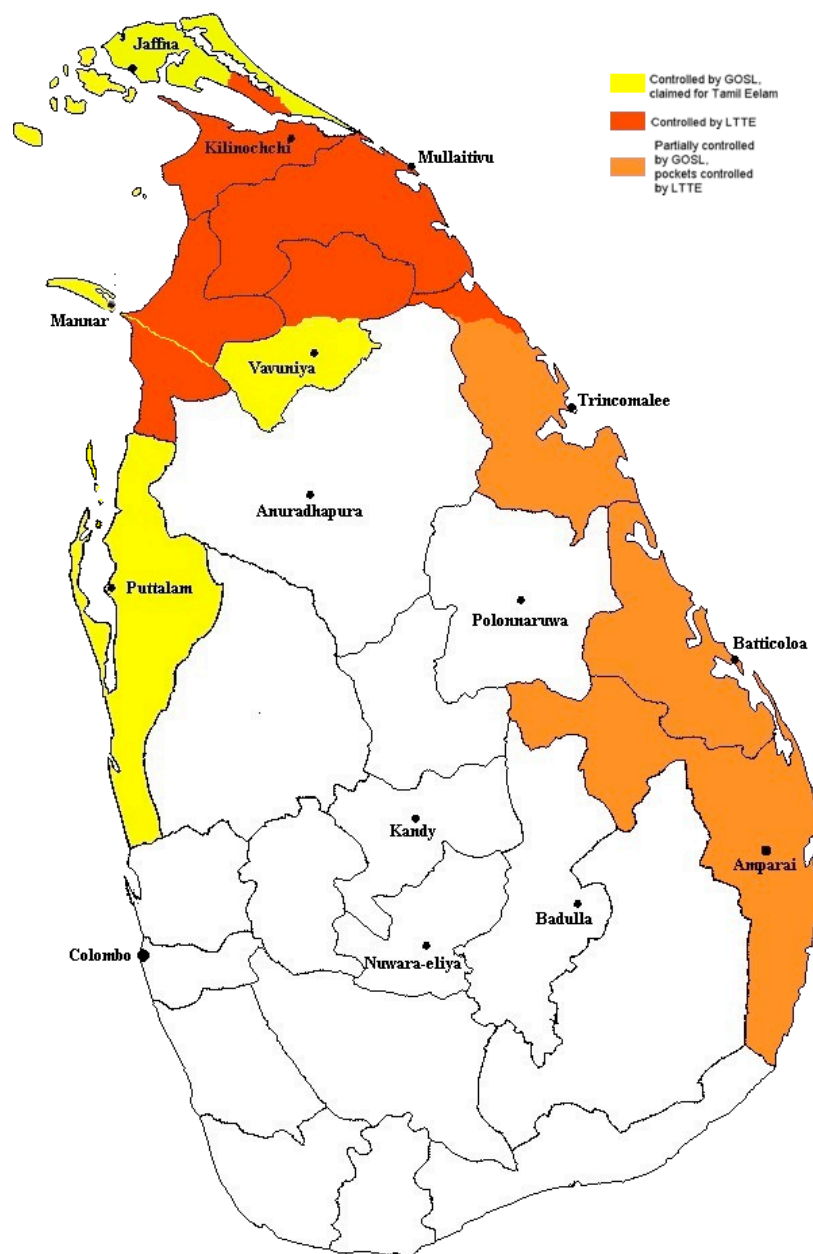


Map 2: Map of Administrative boundaries, Batticaloa (CIRM 2005)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ifsp-srilanka.org/html/administrative\\_map\\_batticaloa.html](http://www.ifsp-srilanka.org/html/administrative_map_batticaloa.html)



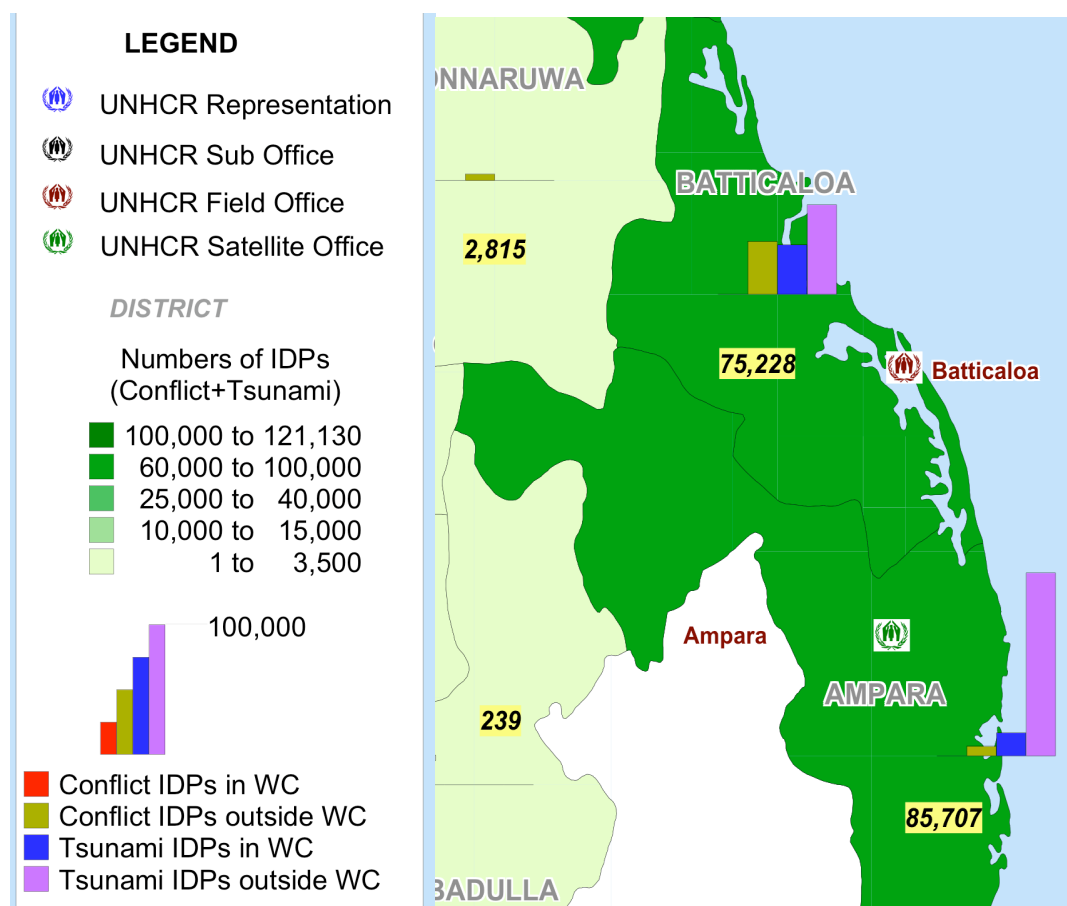
## Map of areas of Sri Lanka controlled by the LTTE and the Government as of December 2005



Map 3: Areas in Sri Lanka controlled by LTTE and the Government as of December 2005 (European Union Report 2005).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Extent\\_of\\_territorial\\_control\\_in\\_sri\\_lanka.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Extent_of_territorial_control_in_sri_lanka.png)

## Map of IDP numbers in Batticaloa District in May 2005



Map 4: Map of Sri Lanka IDP population by district – Eastern Province shown (UNHCR May 2005)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.internal-displacement.org>.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **Batticaloa town, January 2005.**

The street was packed with bicycles, carts, trucks and cows all competing with one another and causing dust to scatter upwards in the sticky, cloying heat of the afternoon. Mapped out by its back roads, bridges and checkpoints, Batticaloa is a town of movement revolving around purpose and need: looking for the best vegetables in the market; ordering gas canisters; selecting ornate pieces of gold wedding jewelry and dropping children off at their tuition classes. The rhythm of everyday life rumbled on, precariously balanced like the family of four wobbling on their motorbike as they negotiated the pot-holed road; one child up front and one at the back clinging with her small arms wrapped around the expanded waist of her mother, who rode sidesaddle behind her husband. The army stood watch as always – stilted movement in a whirl of activity. At either side of the opening to the bridge that connected one part of the town to the other, they crouched on makeshift stools, part obscured by the height of the sentry point. Every so often they would wave down a vehicle with a flick of their hands, proving that they were not as inactive as they seemed. The soldiers' camps were dispersed throughout the town, distinguished from local homes by the coiled razor wire and blockades. Outside one of the camps you could see the wicker chairs where the soldiers relaxed in the cool shady breeze, never quite off duty, their guns leaning against a tree. Camouflage trousers would be hung out to dry over a rope tied between trees; an intimate scrap of everyday life revealed between the sandbags and barriers which wrapped around the front of the building.

It was as I headed away from the town centre that a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) funeral procession suddenly emerged, breaking free from the crowd of shoppers. Led by cadres in uniform, the procession was patrolled by government forces with one of their huge 'Buffel' armoured vehicles pulling up the rear. People scattered to the edges of the road to move out of their way as the cadres walked on, eyes to the front, coffin draped in the Tiger flag that was resting on their young shoulders. It was the funeral of one of the LTTE's Eastern commanders, who along with five

others had reportedly been shot dead in an ambush. I had been told about the killings which happened a few days before on a road from the Northern district; the suspects were ‘unknown persons’.<sup>1</sup> As the procession passed, hands gripping shopping baskets clashed against those holding guns, while children who had stopped and dismounted their bicycles peered over at the young cadres tightly belted in black shirts and baggy trousers. They were about the same age and would have been peers at school had the latter not been a part of the movement. Government soldiers peered out from the top of their giant snail-like tank, which crawled along casting a heavy shadow. Not knowing whether I should be seen amidst this procession I had quickly ducked into a taxi parked at the roadside. I was not familiar enough yet with Batticaloa to know if this was a common occurrence and what the implications were, and in my ignorance, I felt the jagged edge of fear as I looked on. The driver of the threewheeler swiveled round to grin at me as I hid behind the ripped plastic rain cover.

It was in this moment of continuity and rupture that I felt I was witnessing how violence enfolded into everyday life in Batticaloa, Eastern Sri Lanka. The circus of conflict and fear had suddenly swept in, filling every busy street and empty shopping bag but somehow unable to fully paralyze the throb of daily movement, conversation and routine. It seemed that not everything was about the violence and yet nothing remained untouched by the loss and fear which had shaped life in Batticaloa for over two decades. Batticaloa revealed itself as a space of sliding presents and stacked up pasts; a temporary unfolding of life in the midst of a continually created context. As the procession moved away, grave faces quickly melted into the bustle and colour of the crowd which once again returned to the street.

## **1.1 Present Realities, Everyday Lives**

### **Living with everyday violence**

Anthropologists have long identified that the everyday is a powerful tool through which violence can be understood. Just as the significance of the everyday for understanding and

---

<sup>1</sup> ‘Unknown persons’ was the term most often used to describe those responsible for killings in Eastern Sri Lanka by the media and those documenting the violence. Locals often commented that whereas in the North killers were often identified, in the East they remained ‘unknown’. This suggests not only the complicated picture of armed players in the East but also the perceived lack of concern for the East in comparison to the North.

illuminating the lives of the 'other' has been a continuous, though not always visible, strategy of ethnographers, so it has also been employed as a tool of control and terror: a distinguishing mark of Nordstrom's (1992, 1994) 'dirty war'.<sup>2</sup> A proliferating genre of literature describes everyday violence as a lived reality through which the insidious and pervasive effects and mechanisms of violence and terror (Nordstrom 1994: 14) are made more visible (e.g., Nordstrom & Martin 1992; Nordstrom & Robben 1996; Nordstrom 1997 2004; Feldman 1991; Scheper-Hughes 1993, 1998; Scheper Hughes & Bourgois 2004; Robben & Suarez-Orozco 2000 and Green 1999). Although distinctively varied in cultural location and theoretical issues, thematically much of what emerges in the description of areas of conflict critically overlaps. Details of militarized towns, guerrillas or 'terrorists', rebellion, fragmented communities, broken families, displacement, trauma and loss of trust, although manifested differently, are woven together as hallmarks of an everyday violence in which ideas of the everyday and of violence are conflated to suggest spaces where fragments of a familiar everyday have been soaked through with violence, rendering them unsafe.

The notion of *everyday violence* offers an insight into subtle forms of violence which, although they may be small-scale compared to the grand attacks and counter-attacks that capture media attention, can be just as deadly and terrifying. In fact, it is argued that because this kind of violence takes place often between known actors and through familiar objects and items of everyday experiences, it can be all the more disturbing (Nordstrom 1992). Green writes of the devastating impact of repression and coercion on kinship and community relations as they are destabilized by fear and distrust. She suggests that the pervasiveness of coercion even in the absence of war means that people become accustomed to it as *life as usual* (Green 1994: 41-2). The argument for focusing on small-scale violence therefore is that it can highlight these often hidden effects of war on people's daily lives outside of the traditional framework of the anthropology of conflict. It also allows ethnographers to underscore how the mechanisms of violence and terror operate on a micro - level of lived experience and how they are made sense of by those affected.

### **Discovering the (un)remarkable**

Over the duration of my fieldwork, I lived with a local family in Batticaloa composed mainly of women engaged in human rights work in the Eastern area. This work was carried out

---

<sup>2</sup> In dirty wars 'both states and guerrilla forces use the construction of terror and the absurd as a mechanism for gaining and maintaining control over a population' (Nordstrom 2002: 275-276). However, I prefer the term 'intimate war' employed by Kalyvas (2006: 330), which similarly describes ways in which every day experiences become the specific targets of violence but without implying that there can be a form of war which is not dirty or that 'dirty war' contaminates every part of the everyday.



voluntarily as a part of their everyday lives. It was within their network of families, extending across the Eastern border villages and towns that I was introduced to the multiple strategies and spaces that people used in their daily routines to cope with the violence that surrounded them.<sup>3</sup> I met with mothers fighting for their children who had been forcibly recruited by Tamil militant groups; families dealing with the loss of loved ones who had been killed or “disappeared” by the state; fathers under threat, hiding in the shadows of darkened homes, and grandmothers mourning the loss of children who had survived detention by the army, only to be taken by the waves of the Tsunami.<sup>4</sup> These experiences were not new or uncommon under the prevailing conditions of protracted war and widespread violence in Sri Lanka. However, as much as people had come to recognize suffering and pain, this did not mean that their everyday experiences were defined by violence or that this was normal or ordinary in any way. The notion of ordinary violence (when ordinary is taken to mean banal and mundane) suggests a failure to recognize what is unacceptable. It also suggests that the totalizing nature of violence prevents any understanding outside of a ‘culture of terror’.<sup>5</sup> Yet for these mothers, grandparents, fathers and grandchildren it seemed that rather than allowing the situation to consume their sense of the everyday, people learned to negotiate and question, to work their lives around and beyond violence. Pushing at the small cracks and spaces in the continuum of violence, they created a sense of the everyday that was about violence yet also challenged the meaning of the everyday and the ordinary, opening up to encompass other possibilities and imaginations. What emerged in the spaces between the accepted understandings of ordinary and extraordinary was a sense of the *endurance* of everyday life. If we follow Das’s (1994: 164) assertion that ‘a discourse on suffering is worth having only if it helps the victim to live forwards’, then looking to the moments of hope and imagination as well as the everyday endurance which drives people forward must constitute a core element of anthropological representations of violence and suffering. This includes highlighting the *non-violent* spaces

---

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘border villages’ referred to the areas of shifting ‘forward defence line’ or ‘grey zones’ where political and military control was contested by the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE. Here violence was often at its worst. Land held by the military was commonly referred to as ‘cleared areas’ while land controlled by the LTTE was termed ‘uncleared’ (although this of course depended upon the perspective from which you are defining land – to the LTTE for example, ‘uncleared’ referred to land controlled by the SLA and is therefore deemed ‘unliberated’) (Rajasingham-Senenayake 1999: 150). See map 3: xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Under international law, a state commits an enforced disappearance when it takes a person into custody and denies holding them or disclosing their whereabouts. “Disappeared” persons hereafter referred to as disappeared are commonly subjected to torture or extrajudicial execution and cause family members continued suffering. An enforced disappearance is a continuing rights violation – it is ongoing until the fate or whereabouts of the person becomes known (Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2008a: 4).

<sup>5</sup> Sluka (2000: 22-3) defines a ‘culture of terror’ as ‘an institutionalised system of permanent intimidation of the masses or subordinated communities by the elite, characterised by the use of torture, disappearances and other forms of extrajudicial “death squad” killings as standard practice.’

or parts of daily life which are less dramatically framed by violence, but are often lost to contexts of conflict; faded out as a weak shadow to the more forceful violence.

Nordstrom and Robben (1995: 14) note that the tragedies of violence can be ‘counterbalanced’ by the often ‘remarkable solutions’ people create when facing violence. The idea of extraordinary acts of survival pitted against tragic reoccurring violence has become integral to accounts of conflict and war. However, the women and men with whom I lived and worked in Batticaloa argued that their everyday lives were not a case of balance and counterbalance, or the ordinary and the remarkable. Rather, as one of the women remarked, “life here is about finding the energy to just deal with what is there and what comes at you every day”. My research therefore became a project about dwelling in the myriad layers and spaces of everyday life that conflated *being* and *surviving* to a level of *endurance*. I worked with the premise that studies of conflict need to highlight non-violent times, not in opposition to violence, but as implicated within it. As vital as the voice of the remarkable and of survival is, the implicit ontology of suffering and agency, like the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator, tends to ignore the slipperiness of boundaries and less than clear distinctions. Therefore, where we gain a sense of victims and heroes, we perhaps lose a sense of what exists in that slippage between suffering and agency. This is the shade of grey where people suffer, survive, resist, and simply live, the endurance of the everyday. It is these shades that compose the substance of my research.

This thesis therefore is an attempt to go beyond generalized notions about the role of everyday violence, which allows violence in its multiple forms to make claims on all aspects of the everyday. Exploring the lives of Tamil-speaking people in Batticaloa, I question how people shape their lives through, around and outside of violence. In doing so, I also question what this means for our understanding of the everyday and the integrity of the ordinary, and how an in-depth and unbounded understanding of both terms can encompass different meanings and alternative actions. This in turn reveals not only how people continue and survive but also how the vitality of the everyday lives through, around, and beyond violence.

## **1.2 Mapping the Landscape**

### **Batticaloa**

Batticaloa, or in Tamil *Mattakkalappu* (meaning ‘muddy lagoon’), a district situated halfway down the East coast of Sri Lanka, has been one of the most disrupted and devastated areas of

the island since the conflict started in the early 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Framed on either side by the sea and the lagoon, the district formed a part of the Northern and Eastern regions of Sri Lanka that the militant group, the LTTE, drawn from the island's minority Tamil-speaking population, sought to secure and establish as a separate state, which they called Tamil Eelam (see maps 1-3 pp. xv-xvii). The Tamil population, located mainly in the North, the East and Hill Country, is the island's largest minority (18.2 percent) while the majority of the island's people (74.0 percent) are Sinhalese (Department of Census and Statistics 1981). Muslims (Moors) comprise 7.4 per cent. The remaining 0.4 per cent of the population is composed of Malays, a small community descending from troops and exiled royalty brought by the Dutch and British colonial administrators from what is now known as Malaysia and Indonesia; Burghers, descendants of unions between Europeans and inhabitants of Sri Lanka and others including the indigenous Veddhas, who are generally considered the aboriginal population of Sri Lanka (ibid).<sup>7</sup> Sri Lanka's last complete census was held in 1981. Although an all-island census has been attempted in 2001 and 2006, it has been unable to provide a comprehensive picture since it covered only 18 of the 25 districts across the island, excluding many areas in the Northern and Eastern provinces due to the effects of armed conflict in the areas. Given these caveats, I have used census data from the 1981 census only as indicative estimates. Although literature on Sri Lanka often makes reference to Tamils and Muslims as though they form a unified social body, they are in fact historically, geographically, and politically diverse and fragmented. Of the Tamil majority, Sri Lankan Tamils located mainly in the Northern and Eastern regions make up 12.6 per cent while Tamils of Indian origin who are mainly labourers in the hill country tea plantations, 5.6 per cent. Muslims and Tamils are identified as the Tamil-speaking community, but have their own distinct religious identities in which Muslims practice Islam and Tamils mainly identify with Hinduism. The Sinhalese are separated by language and religious affiliation, mainly identifying with Buddhism and speaking Sinhala, which under Sinhalese-dominated national politics became the official language of the state in 1956. Christians can also be found in both groups and a number of religious practices adopted by 'Sinhala-Buddhists' and 'Tamil-Hindus' reflect the multiple influences of the different religions upon one another (Gunaratne 2001).

The conflict, which is primarily ethnic in nature, has affected all communities living in Sri Lanka, however the North and the East of the island, the areas historically inhabited by the

---

<sup>6</sup> Incorporating 'Mattakkalappu' and other place names into the vocabulary of this thesis, I will no longer italicize the words.

<sup>7</sup> According to the 1981 census, the highest concentration of the Burgher population (about 72 per cent) lived in Colombo. There were also significant communities in Trincomalee and Batticaloa who spoke mostly a pidgin form of Portuguese (McGilvray 1982c). The Burgher community on Batticaloa's coast was also badly affected by the 2004 Tsunami.

Tamil-speaking communities of Sri Lanka, have borne the brunt of the violence. Whilst engaged in armed conflict with the government forces, the LTTE has also unleashed tactics of terror on its own people, and throughout the North and the East Tamil-speaking populations have become the victims of the sheer savagery of conflict. There have been successive attempts to develop a political solution to the conflict over the years including a brief ceasefire between the government and the LTTE in 1990 which ended with an escalation of violence and another ceasefire in 1995 which failed in a similar way. In 2002, amidst an economic crisis that badly effected the government of Sri Lanka (goSL) and the post-9/11 'war on terror' which impacted negatively on the LTTE's international funding channels, a new ceasefire was declared. Facilitated by the Norwegian government, the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) was signed between the United National Party (UNP) led by Ranil Wickremasinghe and the LTTE.<sup>8</sup> The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) monitored by the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) made up of experts from Norway and other Nordic countries, led to the ban on the LTTE being lifted in August 2002, which paved the way for the resumption of direct negotiations between the two parties.<sup>9</sup> Although it was heralded as the most successful of its time, the breakdown of negotiations in April 2003 and the consequent stalemate allowed the violence to escalate once again. Although it formally held until early 2008, the ceasefire had already been abandoned by mid-2006 when the Sri Lankan armed forces launched a wide-scale offensive to recapture LTTE-controlled territory in the East. The offensive saw the LTTE, which had been weakened by the defection of a large faction from the Eastern Province in 2004, routed from the East by mid-2007, and ended in May 2009 with the annihilation of the LTTE (including its entire senior leadership) in the North of Sri Lanka. It was during the early signs of the final offensive early in 2005 that I began my fieldwork in the East.

---

<sup>8</sup> Sri Lankan politics is dominated by the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the alliances formed round these two. Control over the government has alternated between the UNP and SLFP since Independence. Sri Lanka has a cluster of smaller but at times, influential socialist and communist parties including the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a staunch left, Sinhala-nationalist party that initiated two violent uprisings against the state in 1971 and 1987-1989. In 2004 the JVP formed an alliance with the SLFP under the name of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and became part of the government, only to be divided two years later due to internal rivalries. On the right wing the Sinhala Urumaya (SU), a small but highly vocal Sinhala-Buddhist party reformed to become the Jatika Hela Urumaya (JHU), a party of Buddhist monks who currently hold nine seats in Parliament (Centre of Foreign Relations [CFR] 2009).

<sup>9</sup> The Ceasefire Agreement, signed on February 21, 2002, had the stated objective to 'find a negotiated solution to the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka'. The agreement set up modalities of the ceasefire, measures to restore normalcy, and created the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. The agreement is available to read at <http://www.slmm.lk/documents/cfa.htm>.

## Eastern demography

The East of Sri Lanka has, in the past, been noted for its distinctiveness as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious Province with particular spatial mapping of juxtaposed Muslim and Tamil communities along the coastline. With Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim populations having almost equal presence with areas of ethnic concentration, this ethnic demography of the East stands in contrast to the Northern Province where Tamils are the dominant group (Kearney 1987). The ethnic balance at the time of the 1981 census for Batticaloa points to 80.5 per cent Sri Lankan Tamils living in the Eastern Province, 8.6 per cent Muslim, 5.1 per cent Sinhalese, 0.8 per cent Indian Tamil, and 4.7 per cent Burgher (Batticaloa District Report, Census Report 1981).

With a heterogeneous mix of communities, the Eastern Province also lays claim to a cultural distinctiveness with the *Mukkuvar* people (a Tamil caste of Kerala origin), forming the majority of the population with their own customary law, matrilocality and practicing of the *kudi* system of inheritance and naming (Yalman 1967; McGilvray 1982a). The Muslims and Tamils view themselves as separate ethnic groups, different from one another. They also view themselves as distinct from the Tamils and Muslims living in the rest of Sri Lanka. While the Tamils constituted the overwhelming majority, since then the demography of the area, as with the rest of the North and East, has unquestionably been altered in the course of protracted conflict. Batticaloa has faced successive occupations by the Sri Lankan Army, the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) in 1987, and the LTTE, yet no single armed group has maintained stable or full control of the Eastern areas (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC] 2006: 24). The last two decades in the Batticaloa District have been characterized by widespread displacement of the civilian population. Because of their geographical concentration in these regions, the Tamil population has experienced by far the greatest displacement. According to a census of all IDPs in Sri Lanka conducted by the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees in 2002, 80.86% of the displaced population was Tamil, 13.7% Muslim, 4.56% Sinhalese and other 0.88%. Many of these IDPs have suffered multiple displacements during the course of the conflict (Amnesty International [AI] 2005: 2).<sup>10</sup> These figures however, provide only a snapshot of displacement at that time and do not account for waves of displacement, followed by resettlement in the 1980s and 1990s for example. In 1990, around 80 percent of Batticaloa's population was displaced due to fighting and in the late 1980s and 1990s approximately 14,000 disappearances are estimated to have occurred in the Eastern province, the majority attributed to the government security forces (British Refugee Council [BRC] 2003: 17-21).

---

<sup>10</sup> There has been no comprehensive comparative study of IDPs since 2002.

The Batticaloa district is connected to the capital Colombo by a single train link and a dusty main road that the army has redirected to snake its way around their isolated military camps cut into the dry scrub landscape. These military encampments have often come under attack, and convoys of buses ferrying security force personnel have been the targets of remote controlled claymore mines laid by the LTTE. Both the cleared and uncleared areas were buffered by the extensive system of inland lagoons with their abundance of prawn resources, which separated the (cleared) coastal zone from the (uncleared) hinterland (Bohle & Fünfgeld 2007) (see map 2 p: xvi). By means of innumerable check-points, roadblocks, and bunker systems both groups sought to control the strategic access route into the coastal zone of Batticaloa, meaning that the lagoons became arenas of intense fighting. Although travel to the East improved after the 2002 ceasefire and people began to move in and out more frequently, the increase in violence meant that far fewer people felt able to take risks and thus the East felt virtually cut off from the rest of the country. This loss of movement added to the severity of the East coast's economic hardship and created stark socio-economic disparities between the economically paralyzed Tamil population and the cosmopolitan Western-educated Tamil and Sinhalese elite of Colombo (Lawrence 1997: 33).



Figure 1: Lagoon side, Batticaloa (2005)

A landscape of wild, open beaches hugging discrete villages along the coastlines which shelter the busier and more robust town of Batticaloa, the area confounds beauty with devastation. With a first glance one can take in the crowded markets, the squatting fishermen with bloodied boards of fish guts, lit by the glow of a single kerosene flame, shop keepers hanging up the latest shalwar kameez outside their stores and the school children in white

uniform, shouting from their school buses.<sup>11</sup> The Cathedral, the Catholic churches, the Jesuit schools, and the library form simple colonial structures washed with the traditional Batticaloa blue, and a series of bridges connect parts of the town across the lagoon. A second glance allows the indicators of conflict to sharpen into focus: streets and roads are cut through by checkpoints; barbed wire marks off army camps and political offices, and army tanks and trucks take on the traffic.

### **Keeping track: change and continuity**

Before I arrived in Batticaloa, much of my understanding of life in Eastern Sri Lanka was based on the work of other anthropologists and researchers who had spent time in the East and had set out some of the issues and problems that might be encountered. Pat Lawrence, for example, an anthropologist who had spent a number of years doing fieldwork in Batticaloa in the 1990s, had described life there in terms of the consequences of extreme political violence for families living in the district. Considering ways in which families coped, Lawrence explored the role of local temples during annual propitiation rituals for local goddesses as providing the only well-attended collective social events in a war zone where movement and sociality were severely constricted. Her study of the role of female oracles as a coping mechanism during the violence powerfully conveys the sense of hopelessness that existed and the lack of choices people had for survival at a time when dissent was impossible for families caught in the region (Lawrence 2003: 105). The distinct lack of hope in Batticaloa was reflected in the stagnant peace-talks and the inability of any government or the LTTE to find a working solution to end the violence. Lawrence's documentation of everyday life in Batticaloa, including disappearances and massacres that have been erased from official history, is framed within what locals described as a 'slow genocide' (ibid). Due to the declared state of emergency, the government security forces were able to commit serious violations with impunity under the draconian 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and 1982 Emergency Regulations (ER). This allowed them to 'dispense with the normal safeguards against arbitrary detention, disappearance and torture that are found in the ordinary law, and thus facilitate abuse' (Nissan 1996). Hence, the majority of the stories Lawrence tells are of summary and extrajudicial executions, massacres and disappearances of noncombatants in Eastern villages, overwhelmingly at the hands of the state, although the violence unleashed by the LTTE and other armed groups is also acknowledged. The overall sense conveyed by Lawrence's study is of a place where all familiar movement, speech and relationships had been halted by violence, a sense of

---

<sup>11</sup> A shalwar kameez is a loose-fitting form of dress, which is both comfortable and conceals the female shape.

everyday violence similar to the processes of terror which have come to define many other places across the globe.

Twelve years on from the start of Lawrence's work, at the time when I began my fieldwork in 2005 (having spent four months in Vavuniya in the North-East from September to December 2004), the situation in Batticaloa and the whole Eastern Province had undergone many changes. Much of what had been described by Lawrence seemed far less identifiable. The most obvious change was the calming of political and military action precipitated by the most recent ceasefire. The CFA drawn up in 2002 was still holding, despite many shortcomings and continued disagreements on both sides. It had allowed for a slow, steady opening up of areas in the North and East of the country with a number of significant and far-reaching effects. Roads were reconnected between the North and South and trains from the capital Colombo were running regularly as far as Vavuniya in the North and Batticaloa in the East, meaning that travel was much easier and as a result businesses could prosper. Where Patricia Lawrence had frequently been advised to stay out of the East and had been sought out by the military on a number of occasions to explain her situation, in 2005, I encountered few problems getting into the East and my plans to stay were relatively simple to work out. There were fewer military impediments in terms of checkpoints and the number of Special Task Force (STF) commandoes in the town had been reduced along with the number of round-ups and arrests taking place.<sup>12</sup>

My fieldwork in the East therefore began in a period of what could be described as fragile calm, a sharp contrast to the raging, and indiscriminate violence during the 1990s. That said, despite the town being less affected by direct army repression and open paramilitary violence, there was still a strong military presence and clashes between militants and the army were not infrequent. Killings were still happening, and not just of soldiers and cadres (as in the funeral I encountered on my first day) but also of those who lived in the towns and villages, and who through simply living in the East were implicitly knitted into webs of violence and fear. Peace talks that had been held intermittently after the signing of the ceasefire agreement had broken down in April 2003 with both the government and the LTTE accusing one another of carrying out covert operations and preparing for a return to war. Therefore, despite the ceasefire still being in place and an apparent decrease in body counts

---

<sup>12</sup> The Special Task Force is an elite commando police unit specialising in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations. Formed in 1983 it received specialist training by the British Special Air Service (SAS). As the most-highly trained police organisation in Sri Lanka, the STF has led operations against the LTTE and has been mostly stationed in the Eastern Province. Over the years it has become notorious for its widespread human rights abuses including extrajudicial killings, torture and disappearances (Human Rights Watch [HRW] March 2008a).



and reported atrocities at this time, in areas of the North and East such as Batticaloa, the reality for locals was quite different. In fact, the lack of clarity, and the resumption of everyday *normal* activities, hid much of what was happening under the surface. It also allowed violations to be pushed even further, a clear example being that the number of children abducted by the LTTE during the ceasefire escalated despite their pledge to cease all child recruitment.<sup>13</sup>

## 1.3 Unexpected Tragedies

### The Tsunami

Although I did not realize it at the time, this period during which I lived in Batticaloa (2005-2007) marked a distinctive and unusual time for the Eastern region. Two major events were responsible for much of this, the factional split in April 2004 (in which a renegade Eastern colonel broke away from the LTTE) and the Tsunami on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004. As unexpected and never before experienced events, these respectively man-made and natural occurrences brought change in tragic ways.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami caused by the deep-sea earthquake near Northern Sumatra struck Sri Lanka. It was by far the most devastating catastrophe in the recorded history of Sri Lanka and caused a death toll of approximately 30,957 with 5,644 missing, presumed dead (Athukaravala & Resosindarma 2006: 25).<sup>14</sup> According to official estimates, 502,000 people (three per cent of the total population) were displaced and between one and two million (ten per cent of the population) affected through loss of homes, businesses, and community structures (WHO 2005: 1). The North and East coastal belt of the country were the worst affected areas with the total number of deaths along the coast of the Batticaloa Province at approximately 3,000 with another 1,000 missing. Around 12,494 families and 55,974 individuals in the Batticaloa district were displaced (ibid). The stories of what people encountered that day accomplished what the tragedy of the conflict had not managed to do in putting Sri Lanka on the global map and triggering the donations of millions by people across the world. The enormity of the disaster was thus matched by the international response with total aid pledged to Sri Lanka passing one and a half billion dollars by mid January 2005, by far exceeding the tentative reconstruction budget (World Health

---

<sup>13</sup> When discussing recruitment I also use the term ‘abduction’. This is because in interviews former child soldiers and parents of children in the movement testified to children being snatched on their way to tuition classes and town.

<sup>14</sup> However, these figures taken from the official death toll in February 2005 did not include the numbers killed in the coastal areas under LTTE control. Anecdotal evidence from LTTE sources at the time suggested that the unrecorded death toll in that area to be between 32,000 and 33,000 (Athukaravala & Resosindarma 2006: 25).

Organization 2005). Accordingly, this led to an influx of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), foreign workers and volunteers into Sri Lanka. In Batticaloa, they arrived in addition to the dozens already present in the East who were focused on either conflict-related and development programmes, or both (Hilhorst & Fernando 2006: 297). The increased presence of ‘outsiders’ meant that for a while it became much easier for foreigners to move around without attracting much suspicion, particularly as territorial demarcations and political barriers between the government and the LTTE and also between Tamils and Muslims that existed before the disaster were relaxed in the immediate wake of the Tsunami. In this environment, local people and civil society organizations worked together to provide immediate assistance to the Tsunami affected (Frerks & Klem 2005).



Figure 2: A woman sitting outside the remains of her home, destroyed by the Tsunami (January 2005)

These local initiatives were seen as a positive sign and a possible precursor to a renewed peace process (Rodriguez *et al* 2006). However, the failure of the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS), a mechanism designed to liaise between the government agencies and the Planning and Development secretariat of the LTTE in June 2005 meant that initial hopes were destroyed. Instead, disagreements over the distribution of aid to Tamil regions under LTTE control and strong opposition by predominantly Sinhala political parties—the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU)—and by the Muslim political parties (Pirani & Kadirgamar 2006) led to new disputes and a deepening of hostilities. The JVPs (who left the government in protest) attempts to block the P-TOMS through the Supreme Court ensured that the agreement could not be implemented (Goodhand & Klem 2005).

The international response to the Tsunami, which suffered from poor coordination and control, led to feverish and competitive claim-staking among INGOs which Jock Stirrat (2006: 11) has branded ‘competitive humanitarianism’. This led to a squeezing out of local organizations and significant rise in the costs of living including rent of homes and offices (de Silva 2008: 2). The feelings of many Batticaloa residents towards the uneasy mix of humanitarian intervention, inescapably embroiled in the fragile balance of local politics and power, were expressed in their labeling of the INGO response as the ‘second Tsunami’, or as one priest suggested to me, “the *tsuna* – money”.

### **The factional split**

Arriving in Batticaloa in January 2005, I found people still upset and confused by the horrors of the December disaster. Batticaloa people talked relentlessly about the waves, both the destruction and the subsequent incoming traffic of aid workers and ‘experts’ who had taken over the town. The hive of activity and the constant arrival of vehicles, supplies and people stood in stark contrast to the isolated patches of barren land, of the coastline deserted by those who had fled the wave. Relying on the aid brought by local organizations and INGOs, people were forced to play a waiting game as the government and other main stakeholders quarrelled over issues of rebuilding and resettlement. The one-track focus on the Tsunami also directed attention away from the earlier disruption to Batticaloa life caused by the factional split in the LTTE in March 2004. The military challenge was mounted by a renegade Eastern commander, Vinayagamoorthi Muralitharan, who had been a military leader in the main LTTE. Defecting with around 5,000 militants in the Eastern district, Colonel Karuna, as he was more popularly known, claimed to represent the political aspirations for autonomy of the Tamils in the Eastern Province (AI 2005). The factional split had come just a month before the governmental elections of April 2004 and dramatically altered the political landscape of the East, increasing levels of violence and fear.

Although Karuna initially made a show of releasing around 2,000 children and young adults, he quickly began his own campaign of child recruitment and abductions, political killings, assaults and extortion. Despite being militarily much weaker than the mainstream LTTE (which became known by Batticaloa people as the “P-party” or “Vanni party”), the Karuna party (“K party”), which formed the TMVP (Tamil Makkhal Viduthalai Pulikal – Tamil People’s Liberation Tigers), was successful in claiming control over the town of Batticaloa and other areas along the East coast. Known to be working in collaboration with government

forces, Karuna's actions negated many of the more positive developments that had followed the 2002 ceasefire (HRW 2007a).

The tensions between militant groups also meant that Batticaloa experienced many *harthals* (general shutdown of everyday activity) called for by either the LTTE or TMVP. At such time business would be brought to a standstill and streets would be silenced, edged with fear and threat. Even the army, who seemed to stand back at these times would seem agitated and tense. With more than one master in this context, people were essentially trapped. To obey one side was to automatically defy another. Similarly, if support were shown to one faction, even if it had been in the past, then a person would be immediately under threat. Children too became trapped, sought after by both sides and often with families having to give one child to the LTTE and another to the TMVP. Mothers captured the confusion and desperation created by this when they favorably compared the control and structure of the LTTE, which meant that they knew where to go when their children were taken, with the less-defined organization of the TMVP.

### **Chaotic space**

Against the backdrop of an unravelling ceasefire, failed talks, P-TOMS and the chaotic Tsunami response, the political situation which had experienced a temporary reprieve after the Tsunami was once again worsening day by day. The instability caused by both events, allowed abductions, extortion, and killings to continue. When asked of his fears of war returning, one fisherman told me "if the Tsunami comes I can climb a tree, but if *they* return with their guns, no tree will save me or my child". Conversely, it became clear that in cutting across the context of control and militarization in Batticaloa, the chaos and disorder of the Tsunami also spontaneously opened up spaces for locals to work together in ways previously prohibited. Although these were not permanent, for a short time until outside intervention took place, the Tsunami pushed back the hidden barriers of threat and fear that had prevented people from connecting and carving out new spaces. This can be compared to spaces created in the earlier breakaway of Karuna from the LTTE, when a large number of children were released from the movement. At that time, although Karuna claimed to have ordered the release of the children, many mothers, grandmothers, and other family members stated that they had to physically fight the LTTE cadre to get their children back.<sup>15</sup> In a similar way to the Tsunami, the split muddled the strict lines of control, inadvertently allowing people to push against constraints and instigate change. Recognizing the ways in which people sought to strategize and shape their contexts, the idiom of space became pivotal to revealing an

---

<sup>15</sup> This was reported to me in a number of interviews with former child soldiers and their families who had managed to escape during the split.

intimate world of fear, trust and silence, in which people worked with what was at hand, while seeking new and unfamiliar ways of pushing open spaces to forge connections and relationships.

A cursory examination of the East's past in terms of violence and contests of control reveals a picture of narrowing spaces, spaces that throughout the years of conflict have squeezed life out of the communities in the East, throttling the ability to move and speak freely. This can be considered as *claims* over space and the profound insecurity generated by those who hold spaces in suspense. Space can thus be seen in terms of landscapes of social differentiation, and as both the site and stake of struggles over power landscapes which reflectively alter the social and physical space in which negotiation continues.



Figure 3: Batticaloa road by the lagoon.



Figure 4: Batticaloa Library and entrance to army camp

One of the things that became most apparent to me during that time was the *lack* of space: a lack of physical space; emotional space; academic space; space to talk and to act; space to relax; space to do what I wanted without pre-meditation, planning and the expectation of disruption. Where physical barriers mapped out the town, militarisation and the anticipation of violence circumscribed behaviour and kept people tightly anchored to strategies of silence and protection. Checkpoints ran like tracks through people's daily lives, while the unseen eyes and ears of Foucault's panoptical power (1977[1975]) meant that, while a lot was known, very little was said. Whether in a line at an army checkpoint or queuing for Tsunami rations, people experienced some form of restricted space and choice. One old man commented, as he waited to register his need for a temporary shelter: "We cannot choose where we go, who we see, whom we talk to. Who are we?" Another noted, "It's not that we can't do anything but that we don't have the space to choose what we do. We can go out, and here and there but we always know where we can't go and what we can't do".

In this sense, Batticaloa was mapped out through its daily *management* of space – spaces that felt safe and spaces that posed risks. So for example, when a claymore mine exploded,

people would scatter into the shadows of the back roads leaving the debris in silence, and when cordon-and-search operations begin, messages jumped from house to house as if on a live wire, warning people to leave the area.<sup>16</sup> When husbands and sons were arrested and detained, mothers crowded the perimeter of police stations, painfully aware that the sooner the detained person was located, the more chance of survival they had.

### **Narrow places, open spaces**

My initial exploration of the concept of space began with a problematisation of the concept by Massey (1994), who shatters the binary between space and place that poses one as a site of interaction, and the other as an enclosure. Challenging the limiting perspective of place as fixed and grounded, and space as whatever lies outside of place, Massey suggests that there are no pure or essential places, and that places and spaces must be considered as products of human interaction and negotiation. This analysis was picked up by Malathi de Alwis (2004), a Sri Lankan feminist anthropologist, who, in her study of displaced Muslims living in refugee camps in Puttalam in Sri Lanka, worked with this blurred distinction between space and place to suggest that place has become a site of security and fixed meaning for the displaced, whereas ‘space’, remains unfamiliar and transient. Looking to the lines of communication, identity and relationships, De Alwis therefore follows Massey in suggesting that: ‘Spaces imbued with meaning become places – places that are more than containers within which social processes occur’ (Massey 1995). In reference to Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, De Alwis suggests that as ‘groups struggle to shape the meaning of spaces and create places, they reconstitute and transform social relations’. De Alwis (2004: 12) locates her understanding in the ideas of Henri Lefèbvre (1991) who argues that when we evoke space, it must be done in relation to ‘what occupies that space and how it does so’. Spaces become redescribed, argues Lefebvre, in terms of ‘[g]reat movements, vast rhythms, immense waves — these all collide and ‘interfere’ with one another; lesser movements, on the other hand, interpenetrate’ (1991: 87). De Alwis argues that the displaced in Sri Lanka shaped space in terms of their relationship to the nation-state and that of the envisioned Tamil homeland, as well as within the refugee camps and sites of relocation.

When reflecting on the ways in which place and space were perceived in Batticaloa, I found that the interpretation provided by Massey and De Alwis, did not quite fit, and in many ways could be turned on its head. Where people talked of places for example, they described

---

<sup>16</sup> During cordon-and-search operations the security forces would block off an area and move from house to house checking identification. They would then either detain people or seize their documents and request that they report to the army camp or another location to collect their IDs. In both scenarios, some people who went to collect their documents never came back (HRW 2007a).

control, restriction and oppression, which in relation then opened up the idea of space as a more flexible and free concept. Therefore, in contrast to common academic understandings of space and place, space seemed to imply a sense of freedom, of movement and speech, the ability to make choices and feel in control, rather than be controlled. This idea is supported by ideas of de Certeau (1984) in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Analysing space and place in terms of everyday actions and movement, de Certeau regards place as a fixed site of stability in which elements are distributed in distinct and ordered locations. He conceptualises place as a kind of order in which only one thing can exist at one time in a location and that location is fixed. Two things cannot be in the same location and other elements have to come next to one another, each in its own location. In contrast, space is a site of strategy, which allows for multiple different actions and people in the same site. As de Certeau notes 'Space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it' (1984: 117). The concept of space thus emerges through the actions or operations that orient, situate, or temporalize it. Therefore while I initially structured my argument round the well-known distinction between space and place, in relationship to the complexities and ambiguities of the situation in Batticaloa with many different, intersecting levels of control, It is also why I have tried to rethink the values attached to both. In this thesis I have developed my understanding of space and place to accommodate the idea that in highly contested zones, where visibility and deliberate action are risky, less defined and more ambiguous spaces can actually provide a greater sense of freedom and opportunity. While danger and risk remain, and in some ways may heighten when unknown spaces are entered, it is better to keep spaces open than to put claims on them and thus turn them into places. In other words, to shape space and keep it open is to allow a process to take place. I suggest that the known world of place can sometimes be experienced as a site of fear and intimidation, whereas the emptier experience of space can be seen as an opportunity to escape the dangers of the familiar world.

This notion is supported by Kalyvas's (2006) argument that violence against civilians follows a 'predictable logic' that depends on territorial control. Informal asymmetries form the causal link between civil war, on the one hand, and both the barbaric and intimate dimensions of its violence, on the other hand. Violence is thus perpetrated by 'rebels' against civilians in order to ensure their compliance, or at least of non-betrayal of rebel forces to the government. From the government's side, violence is intended to deter civilian support of the rebels. In relation to Batticaloa, the space that was created after the split and in the aftermath of the Tsunami, revealed an unfamiliar opening, presenting an opportunity for change. From the perspective of the armed groups, this space posed a threat and needed to be filled as soon as possible in order to stamp control and reclaim territory. This explains why

recruitment by both the LTTE and Karuna's faction increased and the LTTE was keen to implement the P-TOMS through which they would have far more control on the ground. It also why violence increased so severely in this space, since the only known way to ensure compliance of the general populace was by setting a terrifying example. This confirms Kalyvas's argument that violence is predicted to be lowest in territories in which one party have total control and highest in territories in which control is only partial. Such high levels of violence and terror cannot be sustained for long periods of time without authority being lost and therefore, as in Batticaloa, a certain level of 'everyday violence' is returned to and maintained.

These ideas which relate to how space is perceived and encountered are important to recognize from the outset, as they help to paint a more realistic picture of the blurred fault lines and interlocked lives and feelings amongst Tamil-speaking people in Batticaloa. Where protagonists in war zones are often divided into victims and perpetrators, terrorists and state actors, Batticaloa, like many other places of conflict, represented a mosaic of intricately woven lives and histories with allegiances and opinions sutured across critical boundaries and spaces. The nature of people's mottled identity and the narrowing of space were revealed particularly in the ways that the LTTE and other armed actors would catch people up and take their lives on the basis of their pasts. Therefore people were not given the space to redeem themselves, could not escape their histories. The fate of many in this situation was tragically captured in the body of a man shot dead just outside our house in Batticaloa in 2005. He had recently returned from the Middle East, where he had gone to escape threats against his earlier involvement in one of the Tamil militant groups, to attend the funeral of his only child who had been killed in the Tsunami. Days after the funeral he was cycling with a friend towards the lagoon, when the quiet of the afternoon was shattered by the piercing noise of a gun. Lying face down, legs sprawled, and the bicycle wheels still spinning, his life seeped into the sand. He was a victim of his history. This was a history shared by many men and women across the North and East who became involved, often without choice in Tamil militancy. Despite building a new life elsewhere, his present and his imagined future had not been strong enough to dilute the potency of his past. It was lives such as these that I became involved with and committed to. They were not lives that were outwardly militant but the inner views and sentiments, which locked away active pasts and muddled presents, were less clear.



## 1.4 Stories of Movement and Change

### (Not) a Tsunami story

A focus on space provided me with a way of bringing together the various threads of everyday life in Batticaloa at the time that I started my fieldwork and of trying to understand what it was that ordinary life and everyday experiences, caught up in the clutches of war and disaster meant to people. This, however, had not been what I had planned to focus on in my research and, as I had somewhat expected, the outcome of my fieldwork significantly differed from my original PhD ideas. Initially, I had planned to focus on movement and displacement in Vavuniya, a Northern town then on the border between the government and LTTE-controlled territory. Here, I had anticipated my time being spent working for a local NGO through whom my accommodation and travel had also been organized. I was counting on the NGO work to provide structure to my research, and provide a context in which I could feel attached and become embedded. At the same time, I remained aware that the conflict and violence might ultimately control my research, determining where I could be, and what I could do. In the end however, despite the difficulties it presented, it was not the violence that led me to leave my original research area. What did, and what finally pushed me to a town in the Eastern region of Sri Lanka, was the Tsunami, something that I could never have foreseen or imagined. I had not even considered what a Tsunami really meant before it happened, just four months into my research, let alone thought that I might one day encounter one.<sup>17</sup> Yet it came to be one of the defining experiences of my fieldwork.

When I began writing this thesis, I had decided not to spend much time talking about the Tsunami. This was partly because I felt weary of the topic, having told and retold my own and others' experiences; for a while it seemed to be all that people talked about. The devastation of the coastlines and increasing lists of those missing meant that the reality of the Tsunami could not be escaped, and yet it was not the only thing that was happening in Sri Lanka. It did not enter an empty space and nor did it leave one. On the Northern and Eastern coasts the waves crashed down onto communities already fragmented and worn by years of war, and even that force could not wash the violence and conflict away; if anything it further exacerbated the situation leaving people even more vulnerable. As McEntire (2001: 190) notes '[d]isasters do not so much create vulnerability as interact with and exacerbate pre-existing vulnerability' which had led de Silva (2008: 1) to point out that, despite claims that

---

<sup>17</sup> Equally for Sri Lankans, there was no indication that such a disaster would occur. In fact a joke that circulated in the aftermath suggested that when a Sri Lankan government official heard that a Tsunami was on its way from Indonesia, he sent a welcoming party to the airport to greet the Indonesian guest.

disasters are indiscriminate, in Sri Lanka the people worst affected in the East were largely those who were socially, politically and economically marginalized.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that the violence increased in Batticaloa so quickly after the disaster meant that for many, conflict once again became the main component of life in the months that followed. Therefore, like Wittgenstein's (1953: 67) overlapping fibres, in Batticaloa the Tsunami and the conflict wove around one another as communities continued to be subjected to deprivation and displacement. This was encapsulated for example, by a number of cases of child recruitment by the LTTE in relief camps for Tsunami survivors.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it was the confluence and the interplay of these two forces that set the context of life in Batticaloa when I arrived in 2005.<sup>20</sup>

As I started to write my thesis I realized that I needed to find a way to acknowledge what had happened and how it had shaped my fieldwork experiences. The story of my Tsunami experiences on the South coast, although far less dramatic than many, in a number of ways had come to frame my role in Sri Lanka until the end of my period of research and had given me a shared frame of reference with others in Sri Lanka. That I had been in Sri Lanka before the Tsunami and stayed on afterwards differentiated me from the many tourists who had been on holiday and since returned home. The same may be said of the volunteers and aid workers who came after the event for a temporary assignment and left again. Working with two local NGOs in Mullaitivu, an LTTE-controlled area on the North coast, and Muslim communities in Tricomalee on the East coast, I started to feel a sense of purpose and envisage ways in which I could actually begin to forge relationships. This fitted with my idea of doing 'applied' anthropology – anthropology with a practical outcome – rather than being a spectator on the periphery (Mahmood 1996). In addition, I worked with a group of fishermen in Batticaloa, with whom I worked on a joint project to rebuild their homes and fishing equipment.<sup>21</sup> While my initial contact and work with the NGOs and fishermen seemed to lie outside my research, and I took time out of *doing* research to carry out the

---

<sup>18</sup>Although in accordance with patterns observed in other parts of the world, women, and children accounted for a disproportionate number (two-thirds) of the fatalities (Athukarala & Resosindarmo 2006: 30-32).

<sup>19</sup> From January 2005, UNICEF registered over forty cases of child recruitment by the LTTE since the Tsunami. The true number of children recruited to date is probably much higher (HRW 2005).

<sup>20</sup> See Map 4 (p. xvii) for the UNHCR numbers of people displaced from the Eastern district as found in May 2005 following the violence and the Tsunami.

<sup>21</sup> The project that I set up with the fishermen was named *El-Li-Lo* and I used money which had been handed over to me for the Tsunami affected to enable the fishermen to build sixteen temporary shelters for each family followed by three permanent homes. Through further funds that we collected they were also able to rebuild three of their traditional wooden boats (which were the preferred type of boat in contrast to the cheaper, fibre-glass boats being supplied by NGOs) and fishing equipment including nets, storage tanks, a hut, crates and bicycles for taking the fish to market were replaced.

Tsunami relief work, in reality it all became a part of my fieldwork. It led me to a whole new set of people to talk to about their lives through conflict and the Tsunami. Invariably, what I witnessed in the aftermath of the Tsunami, and the changes it induced for my fieldwork, were all realities that I struggled to take in. However, through being a part of the process of life that moved on after the traumatic event, I felt able to accept it and carry on with my research and life in Sri Lanka. Therefore despite the devastation wrought, the Tsunami also created paths forward and offered me a space through which I could learn more about other people's lives while finding security and support for my own.

### **Ever changing realities**

Since the period that I carried out my fieldwork and started writing up, the situation in Sri Lanka has undergone dramatic change. However, I decided that rather than attempt to update my research and keep adding the ever-changing realities to the content of this study, I would stay within the context in which the data in this thesis were collected, while acknowledging that much has happened since. This is also because my focus is on the experiences of people whose lives have not, as yet, significantly altered as a result of the altered circumstances in the country. At the same time it remains important to highlight at the start of this thesis the fact that recent significant shifts and developments have taken place in Sri Lanka, if only to allow a better sense of the context of escalating tension and violence in which my fieldwork was carried out and which precipitated the paths to the final war. In this introductory chapter I offer only a brief overview of the significant events outlining Sri Lanka's final battle which began with the government's offensive in the East and ended with the defeat of the entire LTTE leadership in the North. However, I also refer to a number of texts from which a more detailed explanation can be gathered.

The first fundamental change came when in November 2005 the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) candidate Mahinda Rajapakse won the presidential elections (against Ranil Wickramasinghe) with a narrow margin on a hardline Sinhala-nationalist ticket<sup>22</sup>. A number of significant and controversial factors were seen as responsible for claiming Rajapakse victory over the Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe including the boycotting of the election by the LTTE in the North and East, thus banning 300,000 Tamils from voting after allegedly having been bribed by the Rajapakse camp (Sunday Leader 8-7-2007).<sup>23</sup> Since the Tigers would have gained little from re-engaging with peace talks, the election of Rajapaksa, who advocated a military solution to the conflict, would allow them to pursue their

---

<sup>22</sup> The UPFA is a coalition of former President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the radical leftist party the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP).

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/051204/index.html>

differences by military means (Council on Foreign Relations [CFR] 11 September 2006). From the moment of Rajapakse's election onwards, the Sri Lankan government became increasingly anti-LTTE, to which the LTTE responded with ever more attacks and provocations. When an LTTE suicide bomber attempted to assassinate the Army Commander, Sarath Fonseka, the combined armed forces started a massive bombardment of LTTE-controlled areas in the East close to Muttur. At the checkpoints on the boundaries of these areas, soldiers prevented civilians and NGOs from taking any significant quantities of goods into LTTE-controlled territories and consequently, Tsunami rehabilitation projects came to a standstill. Furthermore, when the LTTE blocked the Mavil Aru sluice gates in Verugal in July 2005, denying irrigation water to the Sinhalese farmers in government-controlled areas, the Sri Lankan government responded with a massive offensive to capture not only the Mavil Aru but also the entire LTTE-controlled territory in the Eastern Province.<sup>24</sup> The lack of protest from the international community to this military offensive was put down to the assassination of the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadiragamar on August 12<sup>th</sup> 2005, allegedly by an LTTE sniper (Sambandan 2005). Kadiragamar, a Christian Tamil who had been sharply critical of the LTTE, was highly respected internationally and the blaming of the LTTE for his death led to a marginalization of the LTTE by the international community (UTHR 2005a). After the recapture of Muthur, the offensive continued and saw the LTTE, which had been weakened by Karuna's defection, routed from the East by mid-2007. During this time, more than 150,000 displaced persons were staying in IDP camps and private houses along the coast in the Batticaloa district. By failing to provide them with any security and protection, the government left the IDPs vulnerable to intimidation, threat and at times, abductions by the Karuna group (HRW 2007a).<sup>25</sup>

## **Unfinished pasts and uncertain futures**

While the government troops began operations in February 2007 to clear the remaining LTTE areas in the Eastern Province, focus also shifted to the North, and between 2008-2009

---

<sup>24</sup> The GoSL created the Mavil Aru reservoir to benefit the state sponsored Sinhala settlements in the region. The reservoir had changed hands twice during the course of the conflict. In 1991 during Eelam War II the LTTE failed to capture the reservoir but blew up the sluice gates and then in 1997 in Eelam War III the armed forces captured it and lost it again. After the ceasefire in 2002, Mavil Aru came within the LTTE controlled area but continued to water the fields in government-controlled area. It is interesting to note that according to a report in the Daily Mirror newspaper, when the issue with the LTTE arose in 2006, local Buddhist priests had been able to reach an agreement with the LTTE for the re-opening of the channel. However this did not deter the SLA from starting its offensive (TamilNet 7<sup>th</sup> August 2006).

<sup>25</sup> While attempting to deliver clean underwear and sanitary items for women staying in IDP camps outside Batticaloa in April 2007 I was personally warned off by members of the Karuna group who told me that they were in charge of aid and did not need "outside help".

the Sri Lankan Army Northern Offensive intensified its attack as it advanced through the North towards the LTTE de facto administrative capital of Kilinochchi, which it took in January 2009. In May 2009, the LTTE were finally trapped, along with thousands of civilians (estimated by the UN in 2009 to number around 200,000), who they used as a human shield on a small stretch of land in Mullaitivu. In its rush to exterminate the Tigers, the army showed little regard for the Tamil civilians, reportedly firing shells within the designated 'no-fire zone' while the Tigers in turn blocked escape routes for civilians in a desperate bid to win international sympathy (HRW 2009).

In their military push the government had closed off the North and therefore no international agencies and medical supplies were able to get through to the trapped civilians. Very little information was forthcoming as the government had also banned journalists and reporters and maintained strict censorship of information filtered out. While the UN had estimated that 6,500 civilians were killed in the three months from February to April, no official figures are available and some speculate that the figure could be three times this number (HRW 2009b).<sup>26</sup> In a climate of immense suffering, the conflict ended on May 19<sup>th</sup> 2009 with the annihilation of the LTTE (including its entire senior leadership).

However, an end to fighting in Sri Lanka has not brought peace and the situation in the North and East continues to be extremely volatile. Undoing the damage the campaign has done to Sri Lanka's economy, reputation and democratic institutions will take years. The government's abuses of Tamils may prove even costlier; its 'ethically guided control measures' have meant the internment of thousands of internally displaced people have been held in detention camps and hospitals, in a violation of international law (HRW 2009). In light of this, it is important to note that with the changing contexts and passage of time, the lives, and stories in this thesis take on new significances. While the experiences and strategies of everyday living have been explored within the context of a protracted conflict, which at the time of my fieldwork looked highly unlikely to come to an end in the near future, they now must adapt to a post-conflict context, in whatever guises that takes in the East. Therefore, in considering how people inhabit 'unfinished pasts' and work towards uncertain futures, the realities of everyday violence, risk, threat and, hope takes on a new urgency.

---

<sup>26</sup> The Times newspaper, claiming a source within the UN, reported that as many as 20,000 civilians were killed (Times Online 2009):  
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6383449.ece>

## 1.5 Catching up with the Present

### Family connections

Looking back now it is possible to recognize a pattern in the build up to the final conflict, however, in 2005-6 the train of events was far less obvious given that the LTTE had never before been militarily defeated. Many locals expressed disbelief that this was possible, although it was clear that a number of fundamental and unique changes were taking place. An elderly man who had lived in Batticaloa all his life, and had a keen interest in updating me on the conflict, summed up people's frustration and confusion when he told me,

They fight and then they stop fighting, then they talk about peace but they never *do* peace. I don't know what peace is anymore but everyone is suffering. What do we Tamils own anymore? What can we say is ours other than the graves where we bury children? Now those Tiger fellows are getting chased away from the East. But will that bring peace? I don't think so because there are always more, always more ready to kill (Interview with D.R 2005)

It was the experiences of talking with individuals such as the old man noted above and many others in Batticaloa that my understanding of events in Sri Lanka and the East, both in terms of what had happened before I arrived in Batticaloa and the changes that took place afterwards, were shaped. In particular, my understanding of everyday life in Batticaloa was drawn from the particular social context in which I found myself, living within a fairly unorthodox family setting and becoming a part of a group of women connected by their passion for protecting human rights and pushing against the boundaries created by the violence in the East.

I had previously met the family on a visit for Tsunami project work in the weeks after the disaster. Introduced to them by a friend with whom I was working, I was invited to stay with them until I was able to find suitable accommodation. Six months later, I was still staying with them and had been warmly welcomed as a part of their family. I refer to the family as *unorthodox* because it was composed of a number of single women and two men (one of whom was married to one of the women and the other a cousin), most of whom were unrelated and not originally from Eastern Sri Lanka. This was unusual in an area of matrilineal and matrilocal structures which underlined close kinship networks and habitation patterns. Moreover, the household was always full of visitors and guests, some who dropped round regularly for a cup of tea, some who stayed over for a while, and others who came looking for help of some kind. Although I was the youngest woman in the household, the

majority of others, like me, were unmarried. While Anuloja, her husband, Rajan and their young son Selvam composed the nuclear unit of the household, the only thing that distinguished them from the rest of us was the fact that they slept in a separate room to the rest of us, who all slept side by side on mats in the main living area. The other family members included: Krishna (who had lived with Anuloja for over fifteen years); Ranjini, (who was a few years older than me and had moved in a few months prior to my arrival), and for the first few months of my stay, Kamla who had worked with Krishna in the past.<sup>27</sup> Krishna's cousin, who was a student at the Eastern University, also stayed but slept and studied in the upstairs part of the house. When I first moved in, I was given a mattress to sleep on in a separate room in the upstairs part of the house (which the family thought would be more comfortable for me). This lasted for only a few weeks before I found myself joining all the others downstairs, where we all slept on mats on the floor in the front area of the house. Although this meant I had little privacy and all concept of personal space disappeared, it brought me much closer to the other family members and deepened our connection with one another. Often in the early hours of the morning, Selvam would crawl, heavy with sleep, from the space where he slept with his parents and curl up next to me for the last few hours of sleep. Once dawn broke, he would return to his mischievous, questioning self, never giving me a moment's peace. However, for these precious few hours his actions assured me that I was an accepted part of *his* family.

My ability to integrate into family life in Batticaloa was aided I believe by the fact that I was young (often assumed to be younger than I was) and therefore seen as needing support and care. I was happy to fill a role in the family as an older sister (*akkal*), and younger sister (*tankaicci*), daughter (*mahal*) and friend (*nanban*). People would often express surprise and worry that my parents had allowed me to travel in Sri Lanka on my own. To my advantage this meant that I acquired a plethora of surrogate *ammals* (mothers) desperate to take care of me and see to my every need. All of this meant that I was able to feel that I had a *home* in Sri Lanka while gaining an insight into everyday life from a local, family perspective. Yet, it was the fact that I could never fully belong that also allowed me insight. Abu Lughod (1986: 18) notes that her status as a 'halfie' (of Palestinian origin but raised in the United States) or 'insider' was both a door opener and a constraint in her fieldwork among Bedouins.

### Locating myself

As one woman among many in the household, I had the advantage and privilege of being able to access the intimacy of women's friendships and everyday lives. Incorporated into

---

<sup>27</sup> In order to protect the identity of the family, all names listed here and in the rest of the thesis are pseudonyms.

their world, I became involved in their activities and party to their concerns and passions. The perspectives of most of the women that I lived and worked with were largely influenced by a critical feminist stance, which had been shaped by, and in turn shaped, their everyday life in Batticaloa. Thus their understanding of the world outside our Batticaloa compound invariably came to shape my own understanding and it is this which formed the impetus for my PhD research. The conversations, ideas, and experiences of the women that I lived and worked with formed my central frame of reference. The particular spaces in which I moved also allowed me to alternate between the particular accounts of women with whom I lived, and the linking passages, of other people's lives. From there I was able to generate many other levels of conversations which addressed questions about everyday living and loss as well as opening up many other possible paths of interest. Therefore their stories and narrative (the way the story is told) helped construct a framework for my research, but moreover heightened my awareness of the interconnectedness of hope and grief and aided my own personal growth in the field. Therefore it is the *processes* of listening to, extracting from and participating in the world and stories of these women that form the substance of my thesis.

My ability to communicate in a Tamil-speaking area was made easier by the fact that the main members of my family mostly spoke in English, sometimes using Sinhala, which I could manage at conversational level. With others who primarily or solely spoke in Tamil I would manage with the help of family members who would translate for me, although over time I grew to understand a lot more than I could speak. In this way, conversations and interaction seemed to form in a continuum of different languages that overlapped and interjected one another, and I found myself always operating in the spaces in between, moving fluidly between language, people, and stories. This also provided an underlying foundation to my research that emerged from the continuous conversations, reflections and sharing of ideas and visions that occurred on a daily basis.

### **The *Valkai* group**

The women I lived with also composed the majority of members in the human rights group known as the *Valkai* group. *Valkai* ('which means 'life' in Tamil) refers to the aim of the group, to support and protect human life and also its ethos, which saw such work as a part of daily life rather than a separate activity. Although the group formed after the Tsunami, most of the members have lived and worked on issues of human rights in the North and East for the majority of their lives, focussing on work with torture victims, support for abused and war-affected women and advocacy work for women's and human rights. On a daily basis I accompanied members of the *Valkai* group on their family visits, to meetings with mothers



whose children had been abducted by the LTTE and TMVP, tree planting ceremonies for families whose loved ones had been killed and other organised and informal gatherings and meetings to bring together those affected by the violence. Family visits were mainly to the relatives of people who had become victims to the violence, and were intended to offer support – emotional and practical – to the families where possible. Sometimes this involved helping the family locate and reclaim the body of their loved one, or obtaining a death certificate. At other times it could be providing small amounts of financial support to the family.

Through my involvement with the group I was able to build up long-term relationships with families in the border villages, mostly widows and mothers such as Meena and Rani, whose life experiences are the focus of Chapters Three and Six. The fishermen with whom I worked after the Tsunami also linked into these relationships, informed and shaped my research, their straddling of the violence of the Tsunami and the violence of conflict in their everyday activities providing another angle from which I could explore life. Moreover, by being surrounded by people at all times and engaging with those who *always* talked about the situation, despite their many fears, made me feel like I was immediately cutting across many of the boundaries of silence and mistrust that existed in Batticaloa. However, this also muddled the lines between research and my everyday life and presented me with many questions in terms of my role in Batticaloa and the *Valkai* group and how my research fitted to what I thought was expected of me as both an anthropologist-ethnographer and a part of the Batticaloa community.

Describing the dilemmas, she faced in her research with Sikh militants in India's Khalistan conflict, Mahmood (1996: 14) comments on how her close association with the militants left her feeling 'too much the participant, too little the observer'. This captures my feelings during fieldwork where I felt confused in terms of where the lines between living and researching lay. While Genet uses the expression of being 'among [auprès]- not with [avec]' the Palestinian *fedayeen* with whom he worked (Genet 1986: 11) I felt less able to make such a distinction. This was perhaps because, in contrast to Genet, my involvement was with non-armed actors and people who primarily stood for a non-violent approach to resolving the conflict. Genet's interlocutors, on the other hand, doggedly stood by their resolution to take up arms and fight, similar to the militant Sikhs that Mahmood (1996) interviewed and the young LTTE cadres researched by Margaret Trawick (1997). The presence of guns immediately changes a situation and intensifies the ethical and moral dilemmas facing the anthropologist. Although I never worked directly with militants or, as far as I was aware, anyone who carried arms, this did not mean that those around me were not connected to or

supportive of the armed struggle to some degree. In clarifying his feelings for the current situation, one friend remarked to me, “[i]t is not a case of being with them or against them. I can hate what they do but then they are a part of us too. Perhaps the only part of us that is left”.

By introducing the work of the *Valkai* group and my relationship to them in this opening chapter, three main issues emerge as significant. The first, as I have already mentioned is that the group was mainly composed of women, which reflected the foundations of pre-existing supportive networks and a sense of strong, collective responsibility that Tamil women have expressed in Batticaloa. The second is that they intentionally chose not to be labeled as a *group* and as *activists* (although for the sake of clarity in this thesis I use the term *group* to talk about the collection of people who regularly came together). The third is that my participation in their lives and subsequent documentation of their work raises a number of pressing ethical, moral and security-related questions. Since I deal with the first issue in greater depth in the next chapter, I consider the second and third issues here.

## 1.6 Taking a Stand

### On *not* being a group

Despite having a core membership, meeting regularly and working with a loose agenda, the people involved rarely used the term *group* preferring to remain less definable and in turn, less identifiable. This was both a response to the security issues in Eastern Sri Lanka, by which anyone involved in human rights work is immediately at risk, and as part of the vision of the members who preferred to see themselves as an integrated part of the community. However, had the *Valkai* group been more firmly aligned to a specific path of political activism, I might have found it easier to understand their work as well as position myself within their activities. The active scholarly discussion about women’s roles and the framing of women as resistance fighters and activists within conflict settings would have provided a space in which I could locate my research. Equally, the lively debates over the lines between anthropology and activism might have also given me a clearer path for interpretation and writing. Yet, the *Valkai* group not only defied categories but actively fought against definition so as to not be differentiated from the men and women in the villages amongst whom they moved. Their work was defined by the choices that they made, based on a set of practices of what could be done in the present context. Where they pushed at boundaries and opened spaces, they also embedded their work in the crevices of life already present, making it a form of *active living*, rather than what we might label as *activism*. Furthermore, while the group intentionally tried to create change through their networking, at the same time this was

done in accordance with the role that individuals and families across the East were already playing rather than being new forms of activism. This was also what separated them from many of the local and international agencies in Eastern Sri Lanka, whom for all their good also put a lot of effort into being known and appreciated, therefore reproducing the patronage-client type relationships that tend to define non-governmental work in Sri Lanka (see Spencer 1990a; Brow 1996).

The fact that I lived with people who worked on a daily basis to meet needs and listen to people's stories also meant I never felt it was my 'duty' to write. On the contrary, I actually found myself thinking that I shouldn't write and that it should be left to those who knew the situation best such as the *Valkai* members. This was partly because those around me were much better placed to write, given that it was their stories and their lives that needed to be told. Also because in seeing the little benefit and change that people experienced from any kind of writing, I also questioned whether it was right to *take* people's stories for my own purposes. Instead I spent time encouraging those around me to document their experiences in hope that Anuloja, Krishna and others would do for the East what Rajini Thiranagama and The University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) had so courageously done in the North, in their book *The Broken Palmyrah* (1988).<sup>28</sup> However, as Butalia (2000: 10) notes, '[f]or those caught in the maelstrom of the conflict, the business of living is much more important than that of writing'. That is, the immediacy of the fear and risk for people meant that people did not always have the luxury of space to stop and write but instead had to concentrate on staying alive. In Batticaloa, documenting details and stories in writing could also be a risky business given that the army could would regularly search houses or stop people at check points. Moreover in the East, it seemed that even if there was space to write, experiences were so intense that words often failed to capture the overwhelming grief and sorrow that seeped out from so many lives and stories. After a day of visiting families with the *Valkai* group, we would often return to the house, have a wash, drink tea and eat dinner in silence. It was largely a comfortable silence but it was also one that was pregnant with the unspoken emotions of listening to people's suffering and loss. Watching over the other women as they

---

<sup>28</sup> The University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHR(J)) was formed in 1988 at the University of Jaffna, as part of the national organisation University Teachers for Human Rights. Their aims were to challenge the external and internal terror engulfing the Tamil community as a whole through documenting the stories of ordinary people, holding perpetrators accountable, and creating space for humanising the social and political spheres of life in Jaffna. Its public activities as a constituent part of university life came to a standstill following the murder of Dr. Rajini Thiranagama, a key founding member, on 21st September 1989. During the course of 1990 the others who identified openly with the UTHR(J) were forced to leave Jaffna; however they continue to write reports on current issues relating to the conflict under the same name.

worked or slept late in the evenings, I quickly came to understand why writing was not a part of their daily lives.

It is equally important to highlight the fact that while those around me occupied spaces of considerable risk, they also provided me with a sense of security and safety upon which I became dependent, and which may have in turn, increased their own vulnerabilities. Knowing how to operate in a landscape of different and rapidly changing boundaries and spaces, meant that my ethical basis, or the grounds from which I attempted to make sense of my position, was equally contingent on the boundaries and spaces of the particular social context within which I moved. In many ways, this was one of the hardest realities in the field for me; that there was no room for heroics or grand gestures, even when meant well. Learning to live in Batticaloa with a group of people engaged in human rights work meant that I not only saw first-hand the ways in which people were managing, but became aware of the many complex issues that faced people – issues which rendered ideas of simply helping or *empowering* people (a common term associated with INGOs) as naive and misguided. Moreover, I also became acutely aware of the extent to which I relied on others for protection and support and therefore found that in my social context I was the *child* learning how to conduct myself in an environment of conflict, where small mistakes can cost lives.

### **Being safe: ethical and moral issues**

Given the context of risk and violence in Batticaloa, the argument about activism and, by extension, the ethical position that I embraced is far more complex than being able to simply claim to take a moral and ethical stand ‘against terror’ (Sluka 2000: 12). While there has been an overall reluctance of anthropologists to take a critical, let alone activist or political stance vis-à-vis the communities and events concerned, an increasing number have supported the emerging ‘anthropology of state terror’ (Sluka 2000: 13). This, Sluka (ibid) argues, takes the form of ‘a relevant and politically engaged anthropology which observes, witnesses, and records, but also seeks to confront, expose, and oppose human rights abuses’. Building on the call by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) for anthropology to take a more extreme militant position and arguing for a politically committed morally engaged, and ethically grounded anthropology, Sluka (2000: 13) argues that anthropologists who write against terror, ‘step outside the boundaries of standard anthropological practice’. However, where Scheper-Hughes argues that ‘cultural relativism, read as moral relativism, is no longer appropriate to the world in which we live, and anthropology, if it is to be worth anything at all, must be ethically grounded’ (1995: 409), I want to question exactly what ethical grounds are being supported. As attractive as the notions of ‘politically committed’ and ‘morally

engaged anthropology' sound in reality, the questions of *which politics* we are supposed to be committed to and *which* morals we must engage with, make any practice of such anthropology far messier than implied. As Hallisey (n.d) suggests, the large-scale challenges of investigating the diverse and ambiguous moral cultures and ethical traditions of South Asia take us far beyond what we might comfortably and conventionally call ethics or morality. Emphasizing the discrepancy that can exist between our own understandings, whether taken from our Euro-centric perspective or extracted from the cultural contexts of South Asia, and the scope of our new environments, Hallisey's subtle argument provides a sensitive and realistic structure. This stands in stark comparison to the militant and more fixed position postulated by Scheper-Hughes, Sluka and others who vociferously call for anthropologists to 'write back against terror' (Taussig 1987: 4). Hallisey (ibid) suggests that research should consider the connection between different conceptions of ethics while keeping the differences in tension to allow for a kind of theoretical ethics which is 'implied by this gap between what we intuit about what should be done and what is actually done in the story'. In other words, there is a need for a 'moral creativity' that goes beyond simple language and conceptual categories to 'achieve a desired ethical end when one is living with and for others'.

Placed within a context such as Batticaloa, where politics of any kind is entangled with risk, Hallisey's argument speaks more closely to an environment where stepping out of line and making explicit one's opinions are aspects of everyday life which cannot be toyed with and negotiated. To put one's head too far above the parapet in Batticaloa spells certain danger and possible death. The moral creativity therefore is hinged upon a grasp of how far one can go and in what situations. Weeden's (1999) writing on political life and dealing with the cult state in Syria provides an example of the subversive strategies of an artist who managed to convey his critique of the state through a painting which to the state looked like a work of adoration Weeden states '[h]e walked a fine line that many Syrians recognize as expertly as they practice what is required of them by the cult' (1999: 3). In examining and learning from local strategies, strategies for an ethical and moral approach can thus be adopted. For me therefore, to become what Hallisey calls a 'competent moral student of the moral cultures and ethical traditions of South Asia', or more specifically to adhere to the practices of my social context, is to recognize those spaces of overlapping control and subversion within which I learnt to live in Batticaloa, and furthermore to acknowledge the limitations of my role. This does not imply sitting back and watching the violence unfold without comment or intervention, but to look for the implicit, intricate, and intimate spaces, which not only form the subject of my thesis but also define the way in which I was able to carry out research and write the lives of those with whom I moved in Batticaloa. Therefore anonymity in *active*

*living* emerged as the key to negotiating the everyday in Batticaloa and to making changes, and equally anonymity became akin to ‘moral creativity’.

### **An ethnography of *process***

The complexities of active living, ambiguity and ‘moral creativity’ however created a number of dilemmas in my writing. This was because not only did the level of violence and risk make it impossible to talk in detail about the *Valkai* people, but also the social context set within a particular time and across and between particular spaces which formed my ethnographic object was both slippery and hard to define. In other words, while my work developed from the kinds of experiences and stories that were extracted from, and made possible by, these interactions with certain people, at the same time, the specifics of their lives and work could not be revealed. The decision about whether to write about the group did not ever really feel as if it was mine to make and in the end it was not so much a choice as an obvious conclusion. With the ongoing and increasing violence in the East and the ever-widening risk of saying or doing something to upset those who carry guns, I could not risk jeopardizing anyone’s life. Therefore, I had to fade the lives of my family and the *Valkai* members into the background of my writing and instead focus on the stories and the lives of people that I could tell. As such, all names, places and details where necessary have been changed and the stories and experiences that I do specify have been done so with agreement from those involved. However, I have not attempted to hide the identity of Batticaloa town for two reasons. The first is that anyone who knows the East would easily recognize the where my work is based. Second, I feel it is important that Batticaloa is known as a place where people have sought paths forward and imagined futures amidst the devastation that conflict and violence have wrought. Rather than be known only through its dichotomous identity of a beautiful coastal town destroyed by bloody warfare, the reality is that Batticaloa is shaped by the habitable spaces that people forge in their everyday lives; lives that are both about violence and about so much more.

As a result my thesis is what could be called an ethnography of *process*, for it is the processes, the articulation, embodiment, and imaginations that spun out from the social context rather than the context itself that has been captured in my work. Running throughout the chapters is an underlying attempt to grapple with these dilemmas. How to talk about the lives of a particular cast of characters who both structured my thesis yet cannot take centre stage; and how to give credit to a group of people who in essence, co-authored this work, and yet cannot and most often do not want to make claims to what is produced?

## 1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The way in which the topics in this thesis flow reflect my journey of research and the various issues and experiences that became important along the way. Thus in following my journey through the conflict and the Tsunami, I aim to build up a larger and richer picture of life in Batticaloa that moves between accounts of everyday violence and suffering and more sustained dwelling on the particular people who are actively making it possible to endure and investing in a more humane future. The first three chapters in the thesis address the specific context of Batticaloa, its history of conflict and how this might be told through personal narratives and stories. In Chapter Two I trace my journey of fieldwork to reveal the many complexities of my research process and of living and working in Batticaloa. In particular, I address the vicissitudes of fieldwork as shaped by the Tsunami and escalating violence in the East. Chapter Three then presents a version of Batticaloa's history as told through the life of Meena, a widow who grew up in Eastern Sri Lanka and experienced the many ruptures and tragedies that living through a conflict brings. Reflecting on her life experiences, Meena offers her story as one version of the past in Eastern Sri Lanka which provides the background to my own experiences and deeper insight into the 'lived reality' of life in Batticaloa.

While the first two chapters are largely ethnographic Chapter Four introduces a theoretical focus by building upon the idea of oral narratives as alternative versions of history. I suggest that many of the previous dominant forms of written history in Sri Lanka and the East have largely failed to question the *lived* aspects of everyday life, which can both enrich and complicate authoritative and official accounts of history. Examining ways in which anthropologists have represented the East, I illuminate some of the questions and problems which they have tackled in order to locate their research and subjects along the paths of Eastern history. In critically evaluating the various strengths and limitations of these forms of writing, I argue that by making visible the relationship between the storyteller, the ethnographer and the imagined audience we can give authority to less visible personal experience, not as a fixed truth but as a critical perspective and 'form of learning' (Whitaker 1996: 1). Taken together, these three chapters grapple with the idea of ethnographic life stories as a product of a complex collaboration between the past and present, narrative forms, historical experiences and social settings.

In Chapters Five and Six I consider the ways in which violence is understood and incorporated into the ordinariness of everyday domestic and economic life in areas of

conflict. Chapter Five takes the concept and basic meaning of the everyday to question the boundaries of what becomes demarcated as ordinary in situations of uncertainty and extreme risk. Asking whether it is possible that other kinds of ordinary exist, I suggest that locating the endurance of everyday life between the ordinary and extraordinary can allow space for imagination and hope. This is supported by the argument in Chapter Six, which explores the experiences of a widowed woman, and a group of fishermen in Eastern Sri Lanka to challenge conventional writing which relates 'normalcy' in violence-prone areas to peace and productivity. The first shows how a woman grieving for her son (and husband) lost to the longstanding violence copes with her grief through sustaining her routine life; yet she negotiates her bereavement by mentioning the strong absence of her son, or by planting a tree in his name, all within the quotidian sphere of daily life, social events and cultural rituals. In the second case study, I demonstrate how a group of fishermen who had lost their livelihood to the Tsunami continued to go out to sea even though they returned empty-handed at the end of the day.

In Chapter Seven I bring together some of the prominent themes that have emerged in the thesis, such as fear, risk, trust and hope, which have been plaited through both existential and political meanings and experiences in everyday life. This allows me to conclude by asking questions about everyday living that unsettle our understanding of what it means to inhabit contexts where survival and healing do not necessarily take place outside of the realm of conflict, but are found at the juncture of cross-cutting networks of social tensions, relations of trust and processes of grief. I also draw upon Butler's (2004) emphasis on the power of grief and mourning to argue that there are different ways of experiencing and acting upon the past, present and future which do not have to be about violence and suffering but instead reveal a world of possibility and fragile hope.



## CHAPTER TWO: LIVING AND LEARNING IN BATTICALOA

One March afternoon at the height of the dry season, a group of us were sitting around in a circle in the main room of the house where I stayed. We had deliberately positioned ourselves in the centre of the room beneath the ancient, dusty fan, which grudgingly whirled over our heads like a low-flying helicopter. Slouched on woven mats, our sleepy bodies melted into the cool floor as the blades of the fan cut through the still air as they picked up pace and found their rhythm. Freshly squeezed limejuice had been passed around along with a plate of very yellow sponge cake in the hope of reviving us, while the front doors stood open allowing the lagoon breeze to drift in. Outside, children were playing in the lane. School having finished for the day, they shouted to one another as they raced up and down on bicycles and tried to play games of cricket, disorganized and frequently interrupted by the motley crew of mangy stray dogs nipping at their feet and running off with the ball.

The group I sat with was composed of the family members with whom I lived, friends who often stayed over at the house, two women from a local NGO, and two researchers from Colombo. The researchers had dropped by as part of a routine but infrequent visit to the East. It was common for academics, researchers and other interested parties to do this, spend two or three manic days staying in the infamous guesthouse overlooking the lagoon. They would eat fresh prawns and curry and visit designated “insider” people whom they could quiz about the situation in Batticaloa, before climbing back into their vehicles and disappearing back to Colombo. Many would never be heard from again, but some, did retain connections and came back once in a while. As a group, we had been discussing an event that had happened a few weeks earlier when a number of Tamil-speaking men and women had been rounded up and taken to police stations across the East. Although most had been released after a few hours, a few remained missing and unaccounted for.

While discussing what could be done about this situation, one of the Colombo researchers offered the information that they planned to write a report on this particular incident at some point in the near future. Sitting upright one of the local NGO women, a good friend of mine, looked at her and countered “You researchers all say that you will look at something *after* it happened. That is not what we need. Then it’s too late. You are supposed to do something *at the time*”. Although this comment was offered with a mix of humour and irony, the murmurs of agreement and vigorously nodding heads around the group, indicated that this was a sentiment shared by most. Having spent lots of time with this group of people, I knew their

cynicism towards ‘experts’, researchers, journalists, and people outside coming in to collect information. I knew it was not an uninformed perspective either, as many members of the group had spent years documenting and raising awareness of the issues in Batticaloa and most had, at some point, been involved in research projects themselves. They were also very aware of all the money that had poured into Sri Lanka after the cease-fire for conflict and peace-related studies. I also knew this was not confined to the room in which we sat either, but that such feelings echoed through the homes, communities and work places across the East. It was frequently noted how many *outsiders* visited the East as if it was a laboratory where scientific data were to be collected and taken away for analysis. People pointed out that despite the amount of research done, little change occurred, and what most frustrated them was that those who told their stories and were encouraged to bear witness to the climate of violence in which they lived got very little back. On one occasion, I had watched as a woman told the story of how her son was abducted by the Karuna group to a UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights. He had specifically asked for mothers to talk to him, and the mothers in turn had asked that he bring up their cases with the government and head of the army. After sharing her story, the woman had left in floods of tears scared to return home in case she had been noted talking to a member of the UN. The mothers never heard back from the expert and the woman’s son was never found.

I was therefore not surprised when my friend uttered this comment. However, I also uncomfortably had to admit that, despite my long-term stay in Batticaloa and relationship with the family, I was one of those researchers who had come into Batticaloa temporarily and then would leave to write something back in the UK. I did not want to see myself in this way – and the boundaries felt far from clear-cut. I *had* come into Batticaloa for research and I *did* plan to leave eventually, but at the same time by becoming a part of life I had found myself personally engaged in ways that I had not foreseen and was committed far beyond my researcher position. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, I would leave and I would take stories and lives and turn them into an academic exercise detached from the tumultuous everyday reality of violence and conflict from which they emerged. My friend’s comment touched on many of the moral and ethical dilemmas I grappled with in my research and by extension, that all researchers in conflict-situations face at some point in their field research.

In the context of thinking through some of the issues triggered by my friend’s comment, the many difficulties I faced in my research experience come to light. In reflecting on the situations and the various emotions brought up by my time in the field, it is possible to start to look at the complexity of the role of an ethnographic researcher trying to live in an environment of conflict and violence. This, in turn brings out aspects of everyday living in

the field that sharpen into focus *because* of the role the researcher is taking on in attempting to understand and empathize with the lives of those around her. Similarly, it is within the study of the perceptions, emotions, meanings and interpretations of those who experience violence that the separate and indistinguishable subjective and objective components of the research process can be highlighted. By bringing attention to these experiences, the theorizing of the anthropologist and the anthropologist's interlocutors in their dialogic encounters in the field provide a greater sense of life and accountability both in research and in the field. These amount to fragments of conversations that are overheard, pages of fieldnotes written under the gaze of curious children, informative discussions after an interview has finished and even previously written ethnographies, which impinge on what we know and what questions we as ethnographers might ask. It is at this juncture, of how the individual and collective experiences and emotions are formed that we can render more visible the everyday notions of living through violence.

This chapter is shaped by three basic convictions: the first, that a focus on the reflexivity of the researcher as author reveals how her relationship with the research subjects is formed, as well as with the subject of violence itself. As such, ethnography entails 'the inclusion of the ethnographer as a person rather than a distanced recorder' (Narayan 1992: 11). The second, that stories and encounters emerging from ethnography not only illuminate the lives of the people studied but also the shape of the relations formed between themselves and with those who study them. Exploring the kinds of social relationships that can be formed and those that are more difficult, I identify two main factors which shaped my role in the field: being female and being white (foreign). Where my femaleness and my foreignness appeared most salient, ties and relationships were most difficult to forge. Thus the grammar of social relationships reveal how ties are constructed and broken in a context where who you know and do not know can often determine the shape and future of your life. Third, the ethnographer's position and location (professional and personal) and the significant shifts occurring therein profoundly shape the contours of the ethnographic process. Therefore, I am able to trace my journey in terms of the specific situations and problems I encountered, which in turn reflect on a number of themes which develop throughout this thesis. These include configuring social and cultural relationships with others, fear, negotiations and decision-making, learning how and who to trust and how to listen to the silences as well as the things that are said.

## 2.1 From the Beginning: Locating Myself with Others

Being is never some fixed or intrinsic attribute; in so far as being is being-in-the-world-tied to the contexts of interactions with others – it is in continual flux (Jackson 2002: 13)

### ***Being in Batticaloa***

In this chapter, I trace my experiences over the twenty-two months I spent in Sri Lanka at a time in Sri Lanka when the ceasefire was rapidly unraveling and violence escalating in the North and the East. Beginning my research in Vavuniya, I moved to Batticaloa following the Tsunami four months after my arrival. I stayed in Batticaloa with a local family until the end of my research in June 2006, returning for a month in April 2007, at the time when the government forces had begun their offensive on the East coast, displacing thousands of people in the process. Throughout this chapter, I take my references from different periods throughout my twenty-two months of fieldwork, which as will become apparent, vary significantly. This means that the narrative moves back and forth within the changing contexts of a passage of time, however, in doing so it reveals the number of significant and transformative times and their relationships in Sri Lanka and the East during this period.

In many ways, my methodology is revealed throughout this thesis. However, there is also something more specific that needs to be brought out here which attests to the personal and private journey of a fieldworker trying to ‘find’ herself in the field and the ways in which research becomes, not a separate space out of life but a intricate part of life *at that time*. An ethnographer’s biography is evidently an intricate and complex story with multiple strands and layers and any undertaking in a context of war creates constraints, risks and concerns, which have to be dealt with as particularly difficult ongoing factors in everyday life. Feelings of fear and anxiety are common to researchers of violence (see Kelly 1988; Hearn 1998; Campbell 2002), even though few openly discuss the experiences of dealing with this. Mo Hume (2007: 153) reveals that during her research in El Salvador she struggled with admitting to fear as she viewed it as a sign of ‘weakness’ and a reflection of her own inability to cope with ‘the not so nice elements of social research’. She suggests that such feelings extend from considerations shaped by gender-norms in terms of what is ‘appropriate’ research and also the fact that fear is so rarely talked about (ibid: 154). Moreover, there can be a reluctance to be labeled a ‘thrill seeker’ (Lee 1995: 5) or cause concern to those back home. These were concerns that I shared and felt very aware of a certain kind of ‘attraction’ that can be associated with dangerous and tragic situations. People talk about the ‘exhilaration’ of war; when danger is close, every object, every feeling

seems more alive and relationships more real. While I may have touched on such feelings during my fieldwork, especially in terms of the work I did post-Tsunami, I think that time inevitably dims the intensity of such feelings. Instead of exhilaration you feel exhaustion and rather than feeling more alive you feel burdened by the number of deaths and the reality that the line between the risks to yourself and others is not so impermeable. Acknowledging such feelings does not have to be about drawing attention to one's own plight or indulging in the art of 'navel gazing' rather it can be a balanced, reflexive means of addressing the risks and difficulties of doing research in areas of conflict without denying that there is a measure of cost to *all* those involved. To ignore the range of our own ethnographic stories and emotions that ethnographers carry is, Narayan argues, 'to miss a precious resource in a situation where we already have privileged insight and rapport' (Narayan 1992: 7).

### **Fieldwork "blues"**

During the first few months, that I was in Batticaloa I convinced myself that before I began any *real* research, I had to understand the many factors and issues that made up life at that time. Yet in hindsight my research began the very day I arrived. It was not in a systematic, structured format and nor did it necessarily make much sense to me at the time, but from the moment I stepped off the train into the dark, cool hours of the early morning in Batticaloa, I was learning about life and taking in far more than I could ever write down. Climbing down from the rickety carriage onto Batticaloa station platform and walking through the gate manned by soldiers whose faces and guns that were obscured by the dark, I became part of the landscape that I was to inhabit. Although I thought I was aware of the blurred boundaries between 'living' and 'researching' in Batticaloa, my desire to carry out research *properly* meant that they caused much anxiety at the start. Keen to start feeling I was *doing* something I spent many hours worrying about whom to talk to and how, as a way of clocking up the interviews and fieldwork data. This I learnt is a troubling feeling for many PhD students at the beginning of the fieldwork experience and amounts to what Wood (2007) describes as the 'fieldwork blues'. However, I might have been more relaxed had I not faced questioning by certain overly enthusiastic elderly local inhabitants as to my "hypothesis" and "anticipated outcomes" of research, not to mention what the point of it all was. As it was, my only real point and desired outcome at that time was to make it through the two years without getting arrested or blown up. These concerns and worries are important to identify, however, as they frame some of the initial ways of coping in the early stages of fieldwork. Moreover, they also demonstrate how easily we construct connections and categories as a focus of research when they are not necessarily a priority for the people at the heart of our studies. While planning out research before arriving in the field can be a way of establishing

confidence and being grounded, it can also, if not destabilized, reduce research to a weak shadow of what it could potentially be.



Figure 5: Planning fieldwork (Batticaloa 2005)

Around three months into my time in Batticaloa, I abandoned all sense of timetable or specific research activities and let my daily routine be set by my local family and the daily realities that happened around me. Based on what emerged at the time, my research began to find shape of its own and direct me in ways that I had not initially expected or imagined. It also allowed me to recognize spaces and openings in the fabric of daily Batticaloa life, which I may have missed otherwise and which I was able to take on in ways that are more creative.

While this did not necessarily reduce my anxiety about doing *real* research, in fact it increased it, it did mean that I was able to explore my own awareness and experiences in the field while allowing the awareness of those I was writing about to guide me. My research process then became more about everyday fragments of conversations, observations, interactions, and relationships. Although I did set up a number of structured interviews and initiated long-term discussions with people over which time they told me their life stories, for the most part it was what fell in-between the cracks of structure and formality that became my research experience and data.

Subsequently, where most people talk of their “methods” of research, I regard the word ‘tactics’ as more relevant to the ways in which I dealt with the process of fieldwork. Where ‘methods’ suggests orderly and systematic procedure, which can be designed before entering the field and followed through to an outcome, ‘tactics’ seems to allow space for malleability and flow, according to the situation. de Certeau’s (1984: 480) use of the idea of ‘tactics’ in contrast to ‘strategy’ describes ways in which everyday practices allow people to overcome their situations. He interprets a ‘tactic’ as something which ‘insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance’. In this way, a tactic is interdependent on the context from which it emerges and relies upon opportunities presented in that moment; ‘the place of the tactic belongs to the

other' (ibid). 'Strategy' on the other hand, is the outcome of 'force-relationships' and becomes possible when a subject of power can be isolated from an environment. My understanding of tactics is less tied to the idea of power than de Certeau implies. While he suggests that a tactic must manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities, I regard them as working with what is at hand and constantly adjusting to unanticipated events in order to deal with the changing realities of everyday life in a conflict environment.

### ***Becoming in Batticaloa***

While an increasing interest in the everyday nuances of conflict has made more visible the complexity of relationships and exchanges in the field, the position of the researcher, has become even more ambiguous and the shape of fieldwork less defined. In a collection of articles titled *Fieldwork under Fire*, which appeared when the anthropology of violence and terror was a burgeoning area, Nordstrom and Robben (1995) explored some of the experiences and problems faced by ethnographers working in situations of violence. In demonstrating that violence is a cultural phenomenon, taught, remembered, transferred, exchanged, and mimicked within groups and across boundaries, they highlighted the intersections of violence with 'expressions of everyday life' (Nordstrom & Robben 1995: 6).

For too many people everywhere in the world, violence is an all too human reality... To understand their [the perpetrators] plight and to try to begin to forge solutions, we must confront violence head on, place it squarely in the center of the lives and cultures of the people who suffer it, precisely where they themselves find it (ibid: 3).

By asking us to engage with all who are involved in violence, even those who are perpetrators, Nordstrom and Robben seek to put a human face to violence. Even those to whom we may have strong moral objections are seen in terms of their emotions and understandings rather than condemned by our own. 'It is this kind of confrontation', argues Mahmood (1996: 270), 'which is not only about "culture" but about lives and deaths, many of the borders around ourselves that we construct as ethnographers simply fall apart'. However, despite the new avenues explored by Nordstrom and Robben, their contribution also left unanswered some fundamental questions about the methodology and ethics of doing fieldwork in violent places. The ethnographer for example is presented as someone who, in skillfully moving between truth and lies, right and wrong and safety and risk, is unquestionably able to extract untainted and representative data from areas of violence.<sup>29</sup> In

---

<sup>29</sup> In an earlier volume also co-edited by Nordstrom, the anthropologist is even more boldly presented as a researcher who is, by virtue of the ethnographic method, able to capture experience and reflect upon it through the use of theory in the writing process (Nordstrom & Martin 1992: 5).

their introduction, Nordstrom and Robben (ibid: 4) remark that anthropology on the level of doing fieldwork under fire involves,

a number of responsibilities and beyond those associated with more traditional ethnography: responsibilities to the field-worker's safety, to the safety of his or her informants, and to the theories that help to forge attitudes toward the reality of violence, both expressed and experienced (op.cit).

As such, the issues raised in *Fieldwork under Fire* address strategies of survival and negotiation within a traditional framework of ethnographic research which suggests that it is still possible to engage effectively with informants to elicit impartial data. While in some situations, text-book ethnographic methods drawn from common sense, such as avoiding situations of military warfare, not putting interlocutors at risk or misusing sensitive information, are useful, there are many times when things are far less clear and previously learnt strategies of fieldwork can fall short. We do not always know what or where the violence to be confronted is. Knowing when to be silent and whom you can trust, for example, can be a vital part of coping in situations of extreme tension and violence, but is not an obvious methodological strategy (cf. Green 1995: 118-19). Moreover, many contexts in which research takes place are not explicitly 'under fire' but rather comprise states of subtle everyday tension. Often, it is the pregnant sense of anticipation and expectation of violence, the not knowing and the silent questioning rather than anything tangible that weave through a context of conflict. In such situations, how does one know how to find people who will talk, and learn the best tactics for surviving without unsettling or endangering the self or others? Although *Fieldwork under Fire* encourages recognition of all areas of violence and advocates moving closer to those who perpetrate it and who we might feel uncomfortable with or repulsed by, perhaps we need a better specific sense of how we might begin to do this in situations that are not cleanly divided into violence and non-violence, victim and perpetrator.



## ***Belonging in Batticaloa***

Being is thus not only a belonging but a becoming  
(Jackson 2002: 13).

My sense of inclusion and ability to re-negotiate my research project largely relied upon people around me, and those to whom I turned for guidance and support. Jackson's sense of 'being', as drawn from Arendt's (1958) view of existence, articulates the importance of the web of connections and interactions which tie us to a particular context, permanently in flux. From this we develop our own sense of being in relation to those around us drawing from experiences past which help to make sense of those in the present and future. In an insightful and honest account of the emotional experiences of her fieldwork in El Salvador, Hume (2007) highlights the centrality of the researcher identity to the researcher process and how our 'personal, political and intellectual biographies as researchers' (Edwards & Ribbens 1998: 120) can shape our experiences. She notes how throughout her research she found herself referring to episodes in her past (she grew up in Northern Ireland) to enhance her understanding of the violent realities she was researching. Where listening to the narratives of violence chimed with some of Hume's own lived experiences, for me such narratives fitted with my earlier experiences in Northern Sri Lanka before and during the ceasefire. In this sense my own identity and socialization nuanced my understandings of violence in Batticaloa, as well as what was taking place in that moment. As such, it was my various contexts in Sri Lanka, which set my experiences and sense of *being* and *becoming* at that time. Although I grew to know Batticaloa well and felt that I had a strong sense and *feel* for the town there were also many times when I was caught off guard and left feeling very vulnerable and scared. One particular incident was when a claymore mine exploded just a few minutes after I had passed under the tree where it hung, and another when crossing the main town bridge I became wedged between an army truck and a 'Buffel' armoured vehicle, both of which were at a standstill. This was a precarious and frightening situation to be in as mines and grenades were being targeted at army vehicles at that time. Desperate to get away I had been unable to move past the vehicles for about 10 minutes. In both situations, I was extremely lucky to not get caught by any direct impact of the violence and as Sluka (1995) suggests, such luck in settings of political violence should not be under appreciated. Yet, the situations also revealed to me the vulnerabilities of life in Batticaloa and the extent to which circumstance can overtake you and induce much fear.

For a while, when the violence was particularly intense in Batticaloa, I found that I became more detached from my role and position as an anthropologist in the field. Not knowing

whether and what I should be writing, and struggling with the realities around me I stopped thinking in terms of anthropology and ethnographic fieldwork and instead felt like I just *lived* in Batticaloa, attending to my family and household duties and interacting with those around me. Part of this I feel was due to exhaustion from the emotional intensity of trying to deal with fear and the violence. I felt saturated and this at times this obscured my ability to know or recognise my role. Nordstrom and Robben (1995: 13) have developed the concept of ‘existential shock’ to capture this kind of experience in contexts of violence. They argue that this is a ‘highly personal and context-specific research phenomenon’ through which the researcher experiences ‘disorientation about the boundaries between life and death’. Thus, ‘It is this confrontation of the ethnographer’s own sense of being with lives constructed on haphazard grounds that provokes the bewilderment and sense of alienation experienced by most of us’ (ibid). This kind of concept is useful in capturing feelings of detachment and confusion as well as confirming that most researchers working in areas of violence encounter this.



Figure 6: ‘Buffel’ armoured vehicle, Batticaloa (February 2005)

By letting go of what I saw as specific ethnographic research, however, I also moved closer into the activist type work that my friends took on. The irony of this was that the more I participated in the work of the men and women around me, the more my eyes were opened to new aspects of my research and alternative ways of understanding everyday life. So for example, through being part of a support network to mothers whose children had been forcibly recruited, and helping to plan tree-planting ceremonies for those who had died, I

was alerted to the significance of creating and maintaining spaces of support and hope amongst the violence.

Moreover, I recognized the ways in which this tied people to one another and worked against the tide of fragmentation and isolation. These experiences also helped me recognise the myriad of layers to lives in areas of conflict and that there should be no one way of recording and interpreting them. As such when using terms such as ‘existential shock’ prescribed by Nordstrom and Robben, one needs to be careful not to let such frameworks of thinking over-determine how we approach and interpret experiences in the field. Where they refer to the ‘haphazard grounds’ on which lives of people we study are constructed, they implicitly assume that the researcher has, in comparison developed a sense of being in stable and coherent conditions. This at once sets the lives of those being studied apart from the ethnographer as well as assuming that those who have grown up in conflict know only chaos and confusion. While it is most likely that the researcher, most often coming from the West, has not experienced such intense violence and suffering, it does not mean that their sense of self is complete. Equally, the women with whom I lived in Batticaloa had all experienced loss and suffering at levels that I deemed intolerable and yet seemed to me grounded and very aware of themselves and those around them. Therefore, our respective ‘senses of being’ were less black and white and played into one another as our relationships through experience developed. These were the shades of grey that were shot through with the experiences of loss and hope, suffering and endurance, a reality of life that defied the categories and dichotomies so often used to capture everyday violence.

## **2.2 Social Relationships and Ties That Bind**

### **“*Vellaikaari*” (white girl)**

On many levels I was always working at social relations in Batticaloa and my awareness of my gender and colour, of being an unmarried white woman in a militarized-masculine, local (and therefore ‘foreign’ to me) setting was heightened as I became more conscious of how and where I fitted in. This was influenced by the extent to which I felt secure within a given setting and the support and understanding I received from those around me. Yet, I also lacked control over the ways in which my femaleness and foreignness defined me and limited my subjectivity, as they prevented certain social relationships from developing and creating meaning. Therefore, while I tried to make sense of the ways in which people around me negotiated their everyday lives I was also aware of my own attempts to deal with the spaces in which, I was both embedded and separate from. Where my gender joined me to the women with whom I lived for example, my identity as foreigner marked me out as separate.

Meanwhile my colour and *outsider* status linked me with the INGO actors while my place of residence and the local network within which I moved, meant that I was outside of the expatriate scene, which was explicitly divided from the local way of life. These two dominant factors of my identity – my femaleness and foreignness also highlighted some of the ways in which relationships were formed between locals and how this effected connections within a context of fear and violence.

The fact that I was embedded in a largely female world in Batticaloa and that most of my relationships were formed through their networks may have reduced my ability to move amongst male-dominated environments and to be accepted by men in their contexts. Although I maintained friendships with a number of men, either through personal contact or through my research, the amount of abuse I received, generally from the opposite sex, brought the focus back to my identity as a female and particularly as a white female in an unfamiliar and militarized setting. This meant that I had to be guarded and suspicious of gestures of friendship, and made it much more difficult to trust men than women. It took for the father of my local family to come out with me on our bicycles late one night to realize the extent of the attention and abuse I received from local boys. In the darkness of the small lanes and roads, he observed from behind, the groups of young males gathered on the street corners called out, whooping and cat-calling whilst making a *kissy kissy* noise to attract my attention. As mild as this heckling was, the fact that my gender and body transformed me into an object of scrutiny and optic appropriation was challenging, and at times, threatening.

### **Bodies and power**

In many situations it was a sense of being objectified rather than being able to form subjective relationships based on more equal terms that held me back. While I had been advised to be friendly and cooperative at checkpoints, I worried that friendliness would be misinterpreted and give out the wrong signals. Often I would overhear vulgar comments being made by soldiers who did not know that I could understand a fair amount of Sinhalese and thanks to my male A' Level students in the South in 1998, I had a vast repertoire of the suggestive language often used by men. My reluctance to be friendly was also caused by the fact that at times I actually felt very angry and hostile towards the army. Spending most of my time with women whose lives were negatively affected by the military (as well as the LTTE and Karuna group) and knowing of the vast number of atrocities that had been committed by government forces, I struggled to put my feelings aside when face-to-face with soldiers. And yet I knew that this was important not only because hostility could often raise suspicion and cause the soldiers to prolong checking but also because I needed to remain

attentive to forming positive relationships in case I needed help from them in the future (see p. 60). How I presented myself, regardless of how I was perceived, was crucial for present and future negotiation of violent contexts. Even though I almost always dressed conservatively in shalwar kameez, I felt that I could not escape the sexual gaze of many of the uniformed men who stood about along the roads and at checkpoints. This was far more of a problem with government soldiers than the LTTE or other armed cadre. Where the LTTE and particularly the TMVP used the image of the promiscuous and immoral Western woman as an example and warning of corruption in their culture, many in the army seemed to thrive on the kind of ideas this type of woman represented.

One incident that powerfully captures my identity and vulnerability as woman vis-à-vis men in a conflict environment involved a soldier deliberately masturbating while pointing his AK 47 at me. This occurred when I was out on a visit with Loja and Krishna to meet a mother whose child had been forcibly taken by some armed cadres. While Loja and Krishna were taking down details from the woman, tucked behind the doorway in the dingy shade of the hut, I was sitting in the doorway making notes. The hut was situated on an isolated strip of land, mostly overtaken by an army camp which had encroached on the woman's territory and hid her from the view of the main road. Rolls of razor wire trailed across the parched soil and a well stood on the border between the woman's land and the army camp. As I was surveying my surroundings, a man emerged from behind the well. His camouflage trousers and heavy black boots told me he was in the army and most probably from the camp beside us. In the glare of the afternoon sun, the only visible bodies were my own and the soldier – mine in my blue shalwar and shawl, his stripped naked to the waist. Locking his eyes with mine, he quickly dropped his trousers and began to masturbate. All the while, his AK47 remained tucked under his left arm, the barrel along with his eyes framing me in its vision. The urgency and roughness of his actions did not seem pre-meditated and yet he knew that no one else could see him. He also knew that I was aware of this and that because he was armed and no actual physical assault had taken place there was little I could do. Power was on his side.

By the time I had alerted Loja and Krishna, who were locked in intense discussion with the mother, the soldier had disappeared. Trying to explain what had just taken place seemed futile and knowing the extent of the abuse and violations local women faced I felt guilty for making an issue of an incident in which something and nothing had taken place. In fact after writing about the incident in my field diary that night I filed the incident away alongside many other uncomfortable memories of my time in Batticaloa and did not return to it until I was back in the UK. Yet the reality was that this incident had disturbed and frightened me in

a way that had sharpened my awareness of my femaleness and foreignness, which in this situation translated into vulnerability and weakness. While I cannot know what was going through the soldier's mind at the time, what seemed clear was that he performed a deliberate act that took advantage of a vulnerable situation of power inequalities. Furthermore, I can assume that a mixture of lust, frustration, and desire fueled this encounter, capturing the intense and potentially explosive climate of power, dominance, desire, sexual repression, perversion and violence that can build up in situations of warfare and define the relationships between those who hold guns and those without. These are the type of relationships which largely come to reflect those of warfare, powerful men and powerless women (where power is defined here by the ability to commit violence), men as perpetrators, women as victims (Segal 1999). Yet the ambiguous nature of this encounter, the interpretation of position and the anticipation of violence, which was caught in anticipation and potentiality emphasized the confusion which can invade certain spaces and the unclear boundaries which mark out everyday life.

### **Woman, power, and violence**

While I am not attempting to draw parallels between my experience with Sri Lankan men and the greater story of the many atrocities of abuse, rape and murder committed against local women particularly by the army: my own experiences illustrate to a small degree the powerlessness and fear felt when objectified by the male gaze. While generalizations cannot be made about men in the armed forces, in a climate where ideas of the Western woman have been shaped by MTV and other such media that sexualizes and stereotypes the western female body, a particular attitude towards women seemed to exist. As such, the window through which I was primarily framed differed to the framing of local woman on the basis of my colour and all that it implied. Where previously I had encountered many of the problems that women, local and foreign, face in Sri Lanka in terms of male attention, what I confronted in Batticaloa felt much more specific to an environment of masculinized military power.

The plight of women and the gendered dimension of conflict have been well documented in cultural and historical contexts and although gender stereotypes vary across and within cultures, it is generally assumed that men mostly fight and die in war, while women become victim to their circumstances. At the same time, this also presents women with a whole new set of challenges, which often contradict gender-roles of pre-conflict times (Segal 2008: 22).<sup>30</sup> In Sri Lanka, the role of women throughout the decades of conflict has raised some

---

<sup>30</sup> For example see: Lorentzen. L.A & Turpin (ed.) (1998); Giles & J. Hyndman (ed.) (2004); Giles W,

interesting questions about gender identity, particularly given the number of armed women combatants who have taken (not always by choice) the path of violence, and the increasing number of women as the primary income generators and heads of household. For many, this has been encapsulated within the dichotomous ‘suffering’ and ‘resilience’ trope, in which the struggle for women, particularly Tamil-speaking women through conflict is translated in terms of the ‘empowering’ effects it has on women’s lives as contrasted with the traditional role of the Tamil woman.<sup>31</sup> Although Rajasingham-Senenayake (2004b) stresses that these new roles for women create a sense of ‘ambivalent agency’, it cannot take away from the fact that in war, women suffer intolerably through displacement, widowhood, sexual abuse, and marginalization. As the narratives of Meena and Rani in this thesis (Chapters Three and Six) describe by taking on greater responsibilities in the community women have simultaneously become more vulnerable, by nature of their gender and bodies (Thiruchandran 1999; Shanmugam 1999).<sup>32</sup> The reality for women in Batticaloa was captured in the words of a Catholic priest who explained to me, “If you want to know what is happening in the East you have to speak to the mothers because the fathers have all been taken”.

I spent much time in Batticaloa learning about the many experiences of sexual assault and rape against Tamil women through the stories shared by my family members and women in the border villages. Most of them had histories which were tied to work with vulnerable women, and particularly in the creation and running of shelters in the North for women who had been raped and traumatized by the conflict. This work they had then extended to the East. Two of the women worked for a local women’s organization which was directly involved in outreach programmes and women’s activist work with refugees and vulnerable women across the East. However, one important message of the *Valkai* group was that although it was predominantly made up of women and it was primarily women from whom they collected information and stories, men also suffered irrevocably through conflict. This was not just as fighters; but as grandfathers, fathers, uncles, brothers and sons, men also grieved for their loved ones, sought out strategies to survive and imagined a different everyday. As Segal notes, until recently an understanding of men as victims of violence and facing experiences of ‘bodily fragmentation and abuse’ has largely been ignored (2008: 32).

---

De Alwis, Klein & de Silva (eds.) (2003); Ruwanpura (2006); De Mel (1998, 2007); Encloe (1983).

<sup>31</sup> See the debate between Adele Balasingham (1993) and Radhika Coomaraswamy (1996: 10).

<sup>32</sup> Some scholars have commented on the ‘control’ of the LTTE in preventing its members from raping women (see Trawick 1997, Adele Balasingham 1998: 279). However, the stories and rumours I heard in the East portrayed a different story. Even where women were not necessarily raped, they still encountered brutality and abuse. Therefore it is my contention that the ability to restrain from sexual acts of violence does not neutralise other forms of violence that take place, nor, as Trawick and Adele Balasingham suggest, does it boost the LTTE’s legitimacy as a movement.

Lawrence (1997) notes that during the 1990s a disproportionate share of men between twenty to forty five years of age lost their lives. Although this age range is the prime fighting age it does not mean that most men died fighting for as Lawrence documents the simple fact of being within that age range and therefore *possibly* a fighter made men suspect and at risk of arbitrary arrest, torture and disappearance throughout the war. Therefore, men had to learn to minimize their movements and visibility such as avoiding checkpoints and the market in order to reduce the risk of getting arrested; instead, women took on these tasks. Hoekzema (1999) suggests that this has caused an identity crisis for many men, who are no longer able to live up to the standard of ‘provider for the family’. This is an issue I address in relation to the fishermen affected by the conflict and the Tsunami in Chapter Five.

## **2.3 Insider-outsider**

### **Negotiating identity**

Given the context of the post-Tsunami rush of international aid, when I first arrived in Batticaloa I spent a lot of time trying to differentiate myself from others and establish my identity. Pickering (2001: 492) notes how identification is bound up not only with notions of ‘insiderness’ and ‘outsiderness’ but with ‘rapport, politics, individual personality and emotionality’. This translated to research which was at times confronting, uncomfortable and difficult, while at others enriching, rewarding and secure. Trying to understand my ‘insider-outsider positionalities’ (ibid) meant, for me confronting many of the complexities of fitting into multiple roles and contexts. This dilemma was captured in the curiosity of an amusing old man:

Old man: “Which International agency are you with?”

Me: I’m not with any International agency.

Old man: “Which local NGO do you work for?”

Me: I don’t work for a local NGO

Old man: Which church are you here with?”

And so it went on with the old man working through all the various groups in the area until he finally asked, somewhat exasperated and baffled “Why *are* you here?” This was a question I struggled to answer, because in a number of situations I wasn’t sure how to present myself, or what my role was. I was aware that in a highly fragmented and violent field, assuming a particular identity in certain situations could be a practical necessity. At the same time, I knew that any association with one particular group could have meant that I was bracketed in certain ways that would close the door on many other associations and



networks. My aim was to talk to as many people in the field as possible and hear voices from all sides; as such, I did not want my association with one group to hinder my chances of connecting with others. Equally, however, I did not want to spread myself so thin as to prevent strong relationships forming between others and myself. Therefore, at times I felt I had to negotiate multiple identities, to allow different relationships to form in different situations. The strength of relationships formed, and the levels of trust created within them were essential to my research and to living in Batticaloa more generally.

When I had to talk with the police or army I would draw on my 'neutral social scientist' identity, which I hoped made me less threatening. I would also often chose not to reveal the fact that I could command a working level of Sinhala as I felt this might either arouse suspicion or draw too much attention to myself with the armed forces. I also feared it could create certain preconceptions of where my allegiances might lie with the local community and also the LTTE. When approached by any armed actors I would play up my role as a 'Tsunami volunteer' as this was largely seen as an 'apolitical' role (for foreigners at least) in the first year after the Tsunami. Given the number of foreigners who had flooded into Batticaloa to do Tsunami work, it was mostly assumed that I was working on a Tsunami project anyway (as the conversation with the old man demonstrated). In my everyday exchanges in shops, and buses and at checkpoints I would mostly draw on this volunteer identity, however, where possible, I preferred to emphasize my long-term commitment to the area and willingness to be with local people rather than the expatriate community exclusively.

Whether this conscious selection of identities in the public sphere meant I was being dishonest with people constantly concerned me, but it reflected a reality that in order to live and survive in the East, I needed to work with what was appropriate to different situations at different times and to try and minimize the risk to myself and others. This presented an ongoing dilemma: if I were fully committed to ethical considerations at all times, as some research guidelines suggest, it follows that I should inform all participants and people with whom I interacted of my research. I should also ask for informed consent. In reality it was impossible to draw a clear line between those who were my participants and those with whom I participated in daily life. I would also be expecting people to be able to trust me in a climate of mistrust and suspicion, as well as take huge risks to talk to me. Therefore in trying to sensitively manage the situation, I decided that provided that my interlocutors were aware of my research, and particularly that those close to me felt comfortable and secure in the knowledge of what I was doing, I was taking the most appropriate course of action in a confusing and volatile context. I also needed to remain alert to the fact that although at the

onset of research participants can be made fully aware of the researcher's role, they can also quickly forget and lose a sense of due guardedness. This is especially so in the case of long-term research that involves living in the context you are studying and being a part of everyday life. In light of this, I had to be careful in terms of what conversations and information I recorded and how the family might distinguish their private information from that to which I had access. Although I wrote down most of what I saw and heard I ensured that I spoke to the family about anything I thought I would use in my research and queried what might be more private and personal. The family themselves, however, helped me in this process by stating information that was to "go no further" because of personal and security implications. The more I became aware of the political sensitivities in Batticaloa, the more confident I felt in taking care and being conscious of risk.

Overall, none of the different identities I assumed were unreal – they were all a part of me – and moving between them revealed how I was learning to negotiate life and manoeuvre my position in the field. Wray-Bliss (2005) contends that we are never merely researchers; we are both researchers and, at the same time, civically and politically formed individuals. We have, in other words, our own moral views and values that determine how we believe we should act in a given situation and circumstances based on our own understanding of what we believe are morally right and wrong. Specific guidelines and firm rules are obviously impractical for research in conflict areas where contexts are situation specific and can rapidly change. The point to be highlighted, however, is that many of the choices and decisions during the course of research can be taken-for-granted assumptions of which we are often unaware.

### **From the outside looking in**

When I first arrived in Sri Lanka and started working with the local NGO in Vavuniya, I relied upon the fixed sense of identity as an NGO member to form social relationships in my local context. Introduced to families and communities by others, as a part of the NGO, the ways in I connected to them and how they perceived me, were defined by my role. However, the disadvantage to this was that the structure of the NGO and the relationships within it made it difficult for me to find an entry point into the community and build relationships with people beyond work. I felt reliant upon the NGO for many things and this inadvertently seemed to reduce my confidence in freely interacting with local people beyond what was instigated by the NGO. In living with an international volunteer from VSO in our own expatriate-style house, I also felt we were isolated from the people around us and slotted too comfortably into the expatriate lifestyle that I sought to avoid. Once the day's work was

over, people would generally finish their shopping and return home, closing doors and windows to the unwelcome sounds and movement in the darkness outside. Travel at night was seen as particularly unsafe and few ventured out unless absolutely necessary. The prevailing sense of mistrust and fear in Vavuniya also meant that there was few indications as to what could and could not be said and to whom one could talk. The part of Vavuniya district where I lived was controlled by the armed forces (Vavuniya North being LTTE-controlled); however, in reality the town was ruled by the LTTE, who fought to maintain control against the army, and a number of smaller Tamil militant groups including PLOTE. People would often eye each other with suspicion, and even though it was often the non-locals who posed less risk, there remained an unwillingness to talk. Questions were met with silence and often induced fear. I remember cycling out to the NGO farm, which was a two-hour round trip and passing groups of local people; giggling schoolgirls heading home from class, mothers out collecting firewood, farmers with hitched up sarongs revealing spindly bowed legs. Watching them, I was anxious to stop and chat. Yet, it felt like a pane of glass separated us – on the periphery of their everyday space I was looking in. I was in the local context and yet remained outside by the nature of my living and working relationships.

Throughout the first few months I was in Vavuniya, I struggled to break through this glass and find a way to connect with people on a deeper level. As well as fear and a mistrust of ‘outsiders’ asking questions, I felt the silences were also because Vavuniya was a fractured place of temporary and transient populations. With a distinct history of movement, continuous with the mixing and unmixing of people through various migrations, trade, colonization and violence, it created a sense of a place where no one seemed to belong. Writing my fieldnotes at the start of research I had noted: ‘everyone here seems to be only temporary – wanting to go back home to life as it was or continue onwards to another life elsewhere’. I also became a part of this transient community – living in Vavuniya yet unable to settle; looking to find a role and fit in, limited by a structure that bound me.

### **“Stuck to the mat”**

In contrast to Vavuniya, Batticaloa felt more like a place of belonging, and a place where people stayed. The strong Eastern regional identity was often described to me in terms of mythical stories which explained how first time male visitors would become “stuck to the mat” as they fell in love with Batticaloa women and therefore never left again. One old man, a Batticaloa Burgher whom I met with regularly, told me that he never wanted to leave Batticaloa and wanted to die in the house in which he was born.<sup>33</sup> He also often talked of the

---

<sup>33</sup> Sadly he died a few years after he had moved from Batticaloa to Colombo. Before going he told me

tensions between Eastern and Northern Tamils. “The Batticaloa man is seen as something different - special”, he told me. “The Jaffna man is frightened of the Batticaloa man due to his ability to charm someone to stay here...charm women to stay here. The Batticaloa man is known for that sort of thing. The Jaffna man fears that the Batticaloa man will charm their daughters and that’s how people stay”. This was a story I heard many times from people in Batticaloa and Jaffna, reinforcing the idea that people who came to Batticaloa stayed due to its appeal and charm (meaning charm atmospherically and in terms of witchcraft). Meena’s narrative in the following chapter describes the various distinctive groups and identities in Batticaloa, all of whom claim important cultural and historical links to the East. For this reason people were very clear about their regional allegiances and sense of belongingness, despite the destabilizing and fragmentary effects of the conflict.

Although I was in a less clearly defined context in Batticaloa as I did not have a specific role or position as such, it was the looseness and ambiguity of my identity as a friend/researcher/activist which allowed me to move much closer to people and feel a greater sense of belonging. I did not have the same security and structure that a position in the NGO in Vavuniya had afforded me, yet the freedom of being unattached meant that I had to pursue my own paths into communities and find other ways of connecting with people. The presence of more armed groups jostling for control and the confusion of multiple issues such as the conflict, Karuna split, Tsunami, flooding etc also seemed to unintentionally soften the fear and silence that prevailed. Though people were still reluctant to talk and the risk of doing so ran high, there was also space for communication and interaction to break through. However, I inevitably, struggled with establishing an identity in Batticaloa and knowing how to position myself took time and conscious decision-making on my part. Previously aware of some of the more negative effects of the INGO presence in local communities in Sri Lanka, it was only in living and working with the family that I came to understand the misgivings locals felt about the INGOs and their work. That I found it difficult not to be influenced by anger was exacerbated by the fact that on arrival in Batticaloa I had felt it necessary to decide which world to be a part of - the local world of everyday needs and interests or the INGO world of social activities and relationships. While the two are not entirely exclusive, and the post-Tsunami work especially had brought many more locals into INGO organizations, there was a particular social scene that connected expatriate workers across the town and remained outside of most local people’s everyday lives which I chose not to be a part of. Given the common bad feeling and rumors that spread about expatriate workers I was nervous about being judged and labelled as part of that world and felt that it was

---

that although he survived the cyclone and the conflict, the Tsunami had brought the end for him and he could not remain in Batticaloa. “I could not face another Tsunami,” he told me. “It’s time to go”.

impossible to straddle both worlds without creating suspicion about my presence and role in Batticaloa

### ***Nampikkai***

While I had been aware of certain dangers in Vavuniya, I had never felt integrated enough to tap into the heightened sense of risk, threat, and danger, as was the case in Batticaloa. One of the legacies of long-running political violence is the disempowerment of the people and their alienation from democratic processes. A ‘fear psychosis’ (Coy 2001) afflicts people and seeps through all relationships and interaction, ensuring that few can be trusted and most must be viewed with suspicion. This is a strategy of those who carry arms. When trust is eroded and replaced by fear, it is far easier to control and manipulate people and ensure that they do not unite and work against you (Nordstrom 1998). In deconstructing the familiarity of communities, family, friendships, people start to internalize fear and threat, which in turn becomes a new form of familiarity between people. This is captured by Lawrence when she notes, ‘At the war’s epicenter, the voices speak of fear, loss and severance of the closest interpersonal bonds...silencing is a response to broken trusts’ (1997: 24). Trust is *nampikkai*, which refers to belief, hope and faith. Used in a religious context, *nampikkai* describes the belief of devotees that their Gods will protect them. In fire-walking rituals, for example, those who burn their feet are not protected – they lack *nampikkai*. *Nampikkai* is also implicit in the making of relationships, of connectedness and of the ways in which people are tied to one another. However, in Batticaloa, descriptions of trust seem to emphasize its absence, or mistrust, rather than focus on trust as a positive, hopeful concept. As one informant described ‘*Nampikkai* can mean danger for us’. Where we have trust as belief, as making relationships and tying people together, we also have a lack of trust, or *mistrust* as fearing, as breaking relationships and separating people of betrayal, loss, and the inability to rely upon your neighbour or friend. Therefore, the language of trust speaks more about what mistrust or distrust and fear actually mean and feel like, rather than trust itself.

Being able to tap into levels of trust, mistrust, or risk, map out potential threat, and sense anticipated violence are strategies that people in Batticaloa have developed over time to deal with the context in which they live. It was in watching and listening to others, and guided by those close to me, that I also learnt to question everything and everyone, to observe the language people used; what they said and did not say, the way people spoke and to differentiate between raised and hushed tones. More generally, I learnt to always be alert and aware of those around me, and the exchanges taking place. This was not only through words, but also body language, eye contact and atmosphere. There were times when I noticed that

the people close to me would share only limited fragments of stories, leave things unsaid or converse in hushed voices or fast Tamil. Initially I felt hurt and offended by being kept out of information circles, which I took to mean I was not trusted. However, over time I realized that this was not about trusting me but about the dangerous nature of information in a complex and fluctuating situation. While I might be trusted to keep what I knew to myself, there was always the danger of what knowing this information could mean and the potentially difficult situations this might put me in. Trust could therefore be given fully in some ways while in others there was no room for all or any of it. This relates to what Das has described as 'poisonous knowledge', wherein the past as an act of witnessing is carried into the present and can seep into the responses of the everyday. Therefore, although Lawrence (1997), along with others such as Nordstrom (2004) and Green (1995), emphasize the loss of trust and fractured relationships in areas of conflict, the stories in this thesis reveal a reality where this is not always a totalizing situation. Beyond the more obvious loss, there are remnants of old as well as newly formed relationships and networks in which trust is intricately bound and alive.

At one particularly tense time during my stay in Batticaloa, soldiers at checkpoints around the town warned local people living around them not to approach or try and speak to them. This was because they felt under threat and knew that if they anticipated a grenade or shooting they would respond by shooting indiscriminately, regardless of whether they knew people or not. Thus the level of violence meant that they had to remain suspicious and mistrustful of some locals and, equally people could not trust them for protection. At the same time, however, it was the trust that did exist between certain people and in specific relationships that allowed people to cope and to carry on. The soldiers at the checkpoint for example had to trust one another to keep vigilant and protect each other. Meanwhile the neighbours around them learnt to trust the soldiers' assessment of the situation and to keep clear for their own safety. As such, trust was not completely broken but nor was it taken for granted.

### **Child's play**

Living with a six year old boy also provided a sense of family responsibility and security; the needs and demands of a child often diffusing tense situations and creating humor and fun where it may otherwise have been lacking. At first wary of the white woman who was welcomed into his home, Selvam and I grew very close over time. Being the youngest two in the household (despite nineteen years difference) there was a special bond between Selvam and myself, possibly because I was often looked after as one of the younger ones and also

because I had more free time to spend playing with him. As such, he grew to trust me and to rely on me in situations where previously he would have only turned to his *amma* or one of the other women in the house. In the months following the Tsunami, Selvam was extremely anxious and always checking where his *amma* was by calling out to her every five minutes. This seemed to be a reaction to the amount of fear the Tsunami had created and to witnessing his parents being frightened also which for a child can have a powerful effect on their sense of security and levels of trust. Of the conflict situation in Sri Lanka, Daya Somasundaram (2007: 27) has noted that the submissive posture (e.g. 'removal of hat, bent head and body, low and almost pleading tone of voice') adopted by parents when accosted by the security forces at checkpoints can cause children to lose faith in their parents. This is because the children do not comprehend the full purpose of their parents' actions (in order to safeguard their children by avoiding hassle) and therefore perceive their parents as powerless. In a similar way, Selvam seemed to lose faith in his parents' ability to look after him as well as in his everyday environment, which during the Tsunami had been turned upside down. It took him a long time to learn to trust his parents again, as well as trust a new member of the family.



Figure 7: From a child's view (Batticaloa 2005)

In this way, being around a child also enabled me to see the ways in which youth in Batticaloa react and deal with the violence around them. I was often particularly intrigued by Selvam's reactions to the militarization around us and would watch his face carefully as we passed checkpoints, armed cadres, and places of destruction. His mother told me that when he was a small child he had once noted, at a checkpoint, that the gun the soldier was carrying made him look as if he was playing a violin. Later on, however a noticeable shift took place when he pointed out a statue to me in the cathedral grounds and claimed that the small object the saint was carrying was a grenade.

Selvam was always full of questions – most were the regular why, what and how’s that any young child asks. Others, however, were more disturbing; “What would happen if I put a rocket in your head and blew you up?” was a favourite, along with “How many bits does a human body break into if hit by a shell?” More poignant was when he asked his father “*Appa*, why does everybody that we love die?” His father, who was cycling and had Selvam sitting over the handlebars at the time, was taken aback. He tried to give an answer that not everyone died and that it was to do with the tragedy of war, but Selvam twisted around to look at his father’s face and said “In that case I think everyone should be put together and shot now so that we don’t lose people one by one”.

While such comments highlight the influence of violence on a child’s mind of interest to me was Selvam’s openness and the security he felt in order to ask me such questions and trust me as a family member. This illustrates the extent to which we became connected and formed ties that bound us together in this context. Moreover, compared to the relative isolation of living as an expatriate and working with an NGO, the opportunity to create family relationships in Batticaloa allowed a greater sense of engagement and socialization on a local level as well as a feeling of security and support.

## **2.4 Permeable Boundaries between Self and Other**

Now you are here you will start to see that everything, bit by bit, is becoming militarized. Soon we will all have a gun

What are you still doing here? Have you planned a way out?  
Don’t you know that it will get worse and then people like you will be trapped?

(Comments by Batticaloa residents 2005)

### **Shared fear**

Although the Tsunami initially set the context for my move to Batticaloa, it was the overall violence, which was both separate from and exacerbated by the Tsunami, which dominated my experiences of life in the East. Tension was already increasing when I arrived in 2005, but it was after the Mavil Aru sluice gate incident in 2006 (described in Chapter One p.22) however, that things really began to unravel. It was around this time that the number of claymore mines, grenade attacks, and eventually shelling started to increase. During the time of the government’s ‘reawakening of the East’ in April and May 2007, we experienced a heavy shelling campaign by the army. Although the shells were fired out from the central army camp at LTTE-controlled areas, they flew low over Batticaloa town, leaving a dark



shadow of fear in their tracks. It is my observations from this time that form the basis of my exploration of 'the everyday' in Chapter Five. My clearest memories from that time are when the shelling would start up in the early hours of the morning after a short few hours lull. Lying side by side on our mats, myself and the other women would wake to the entire house shaking and the fan starting to tremble precariously above us. In the darkness, we would whisper to one another, trying to sound calm and comforting despite the fluttering presence of panic and fear in our stomachs. We would then hear Selvam wake up in the next room and call out to his *amma* (his *appa* was away at the time and so there were only female adults in the house). He would demand that his *amma* moved closer to him while he asked her repeatedly where the shells were directed, if they would fall on us and what would happen if they did. His daylight hours filled with schoolboy chatter about the size and cost of the multi-barrel rockets and the damage they could cause, at night turned into tears, his words shaped by fear.

The fact that I experienced first hand a number of significant events such as the Tsunami and the resumption of fighting during my time in Sri Lanka, seemed to connect me to people in a way that conversations and interactions could not. The experiences of the Tsunami waves, the peppering of fear in town and the folding away of feelings which could not be immediately dealt with were strung out like thick threads, stitching us together through shared emotions. At the same time, by the nature of their unfamiliarity to me, many of these events also loosened that thread and separated me from others, especially where relationships were thin, and support therefore limited. Although my experiences were connected to, and shared with those around me, my physical and emotional reactions were individual and often cast light upon the difference between others and myself. Tied in with my concerns about how I did my research, what the point of it was, and the weight of decision-making, my emotional world was at times difficult to manage. That I had a sense of the anxieties and fears of people in Batticaloa in one way meant I felt closer and more in tune with those around me. In another, it revealed the very different perceptions that non-locals may have of any given situation and therefore enabled me to analyze reflexively the difference between those who live through violence on a long-term basis and those who step into that experience for a temporary period of time. Further, the temporariness of my experience, and the knowledge that I could leave at any time, left me with feelings of relief, guilt, and shame.

## **Familiar fear**

In her article, 'Fear as a Way of Life' Linda Green (1999) examines the role of fear and terror through the quotidian experiences of the people of Xe'caj in Guatemala. In doing so she tries to capture a sense of the insecurity that permeates women's lives in Xe'caj and the ways in which they work through it to survive. Green recounts some of her experiences of fear to describe the process through which she tried to make sense of life and manage herself in El Salvador: 'Fear joined me to the people and yet separated me from them as well' (ibid: 20). At first convinced by a friend that she was 'too caught up in terror talk' and thus being 'hysterical', she then realized that it was through the 'routinization of terror' that it became powerful and thus led to her doubting her own perceptions of reality. She notes the debilitating effects of the mind and body's attempt to deal with fear and highlights the 'night time hysteria' and states of hyper vigilance she experienced. As such, Green acknowledges that in living in a climate of fear not only revealed that the women of Xe'caj to have learnt to 'accommodate' and become familiar with fear but also she had, to an extent, done the same (ibid). In becoming attuned to the ambiguous nature of situations, the subtle messages of threat and the whisperings and rumors that circulated in Batticaloa, my mind and body also adapted to ways of coping with violence in everyday life. It was not until the latter half of my research time that I really acknowledged that living in Batticaloa was a frightening experience.

Learning to identify threat and live with fear were dual lessons that for me were enlightening in terms of understanding the situation, but frightening too given that there were no specific guidelines and you had to rely on your own sense and understanding in the moment. The fear that builds up with the threat of violence cannot be underestimated; like a dramatic thunderstorm that follows increasing humidity, only the anticipated outcome was not always a relief but far more tragic and final. At times I found myself wishing something would actually happen, if not to just break the mounting tension. In such situations, every movement, and noise, would be interpreted in terms of violence and threat, such as the sound of building work being heard as explosions. I can remember one afternoon when my friend and I heard loud banging noises coming from outside the house. Immediately thinking these were gunshots, we both crept really quietly out of the house, our minds invaded with thoughts of what might be happening and what we should do. Tentatively moving across the compound, we arrived at the gate, only to find two men loading bricks onto a cart, each brick landing with a bang. It was more relief than our own foolishness that saw us collapse into fits of laughter in the garden sand. This was one of many situations which although ultimately

amusing, induced fear that was not quick to leave us and that edgy feeling was something that would follow me around for days at a time.

## Counting the losses

Although many experiences were positive and enjoyable, a number were difficult and occasionally tragic, as might be expected in a place of conflict. In Vavuniya in the early months of my fieldwork, one of the young women working for the local NGO to which I was attached committed suicide. Although I had not known her that long, she and I had been pushed together on the basis that we were a similar age, shared interests and both wanted to improve our language skills in Tamil and English, respectively. She worked at a special needs school run by the NGO and her brightness and enthusiasm had kept me motivated in the early days of my arrival. However, this exterior happiness clearly hid something darker underneath as early on in 2005 she filled her pockets with heavy rocks and jumped into the deep well on the farm where the NGO was based. By the time her body was dragged up using a length of barbed wire, she had been dead for a number of hours.

Her death marked the beginning of a bitter dispute between the two heads of the NGO, which in its final stages saw the organization split into two. Although I tried to stay neutral, and managed to do so mainly due to my move to the East, the death of my friend and the arguments that followed affected me more than I was able to acknowledge at the time. The grief that everyone felt both separated and brought us closer together. A few weeks before her death I had interviewed the Child Protection Officer (CPO) in Vavuniya who had talked me through the facts and figures for the suicide rates in the region. Most were among young people and effected through drinking pesticides, ingesting yellow oleander seeds (*alari*), and, jumping into wells.<sup>34</sup> At the time, these statistics were shocking but remained unreal. It was not until my friend died that they gained a reality beyond the pages of the CPO's notebook that I not only witnessed but also felt. Although I had encountered death both inside and outside of Sri Lanka, this situation still took me by surprise, especially as it started a series of tragedies and losses that I experienced in Sri Lanka. In January 2006, for example, another suicide happened. This time it was a good friend of mine called Meeto with whom I had spent much time in Sri Lanka over the summer of 2002. She died in the UK, but the news

---

<sup>34</sup> The ingestion of yellow oleander seeds is a well-known cause of death and more recently is reported to have become a popular method of self-harm in Northern Sri Lanka. Research in 1995 found that there are thousands of cases each year and in a hospital in Anuradapura recorded that the majority of cases of oleander poisoning were amongst women and almost half amongst under twenty ones (Eddleson, M, Ariaratnam *et al* 1999: 266). In areas such as Vavuniya where oleander seeds grow in abundance, there are large poster boards identifying the plant and warning of its dangers. However, as a local doctor noted to me, the irony of these posters was that it also showed people what the plant looked like therefore assisting those who intended to commit suicide.

reached me quickly in Batticaloa because it transgressed that my local family knew her through her mother who was a fellow feminist activist. It was only through Meeto's death that I discovered this connection, and as a result, we were able to support one another and make sense of this unfortunate experience in the light of shared understandings. Together we held a small memorial ceremony for Meeto, lighting candles and sharing memories. In the days following her death, one of the women also started to open up to me, telling me about the suicide of her brother and how she and her family had coped since.

Therefore unlike my friend's death in Vavuniya, this time I was able to talk through the experience, learn from my family and also contextualize their links with activism, women across India and personal experiences of loss. Again this points to the level of integration I felt in Batticaloa, which allowed me to grieve in a supportive environment in contrast to the isolation I felt in Vavuniya, which meant that it was much harder to make sense of and recover from loss. Obviously, while these experiences enriched my understanding of life (and death) in Sri Lanka and were the level of involvement I perhaps initially sought, they also raised a multitude of confusing questions about my role in the field; where my participation began and where it finished, and the extent to which the field was my *real* life. However, I felt that it was through reflecting on the relationships I had with people and how these extended or contracted, that I was able to explore these questions more fully.

### **Making sense of violence**

On occasion, people both in Sri Lanka and outside with whom I had contact suggested that I leave the East and return to the capital for a while. While I did not always take such advice, I did try and keep options open for leaving if and when necessary. I also took occasional breaks in the capital to escape the intensity of Batticaloa life. However I noticed that the longer I stayed in the East, the harder I found it to extricate myself from the relationships and ties I felt there, and a break in the capital felt more isolating even than life in Batticaloa. Hearn (1998: 52) warns that researching violence 'involves constant thought about violence' and there were few times, even when in the South, that I was able to disconnect and switch off from violence. Decisions such as to whether to leave and the many others that I faced during fieldwork caused anxiety and aroused feelings of inadequacy and guilt which stayed with me long after I left the field. Primo Levi (1988), an Auschwitz survivor, speaks of the 'grey zone' in narrating the stories of concentration camp inmates who were often forced into mutual betrayal and complicity with the enemy in exchange for the smallest favours. While I am not suggesting life in Batticaloa was akin to survival in a concentration camp, the 'grey zone' of making decisions to protect oneself, sometimes at the expense of others, was

very real. Therefore, I suggest that it is in the acknowledgement of feelings such as fear and guilt that knowledge and experience can be brought together to create a more intimate sense of life in the field. As Pickering (2001: 486) argues, ‘if we demarcate experience as the ‘other’ to objective knowledge then we separate the study of people’s struggle from the experience of struggle.’

As one of only a few anthropologists to address the emotional side of field work in areas of conflict, Wood (2007) notes that through observing suffering or hearing the effects of violence, researchers are likely to experience intense emotions such as fear, anger, grief and pity, which in extreme cases can lead to “secondary trauma”. While applying such specific labels to these experiences is not always either useful or straightforward what is important is that the emotional side of fieldwork is recognized as an experience in the researchers’ life and not just an insight into an ‘other’ life.<sup>35</sup> In her article about the ethical challenges of field research in conflict-zones, Wood describes the emotional reserve necessary in interviews and the draining effect of listening to stories. I would add to this that such experiences also required learning new skills in balancing sympathy with a certain amount of emotional detachment to allow oneself to sustain life in the field. Much of the time this felt impossible given that such stories were not confined to the past and continued around me in the field. The emotional weight of interactions was intense and this also created many ethical questions about responsibility and involvement.

## **2.5 Learning to know what not to know**

### **Protective silence**

Knowing who I could talk to, how and why were important issues that framed my research on a daily basis. Given that my intention was to listen to what people could tell me about their experiences of living through a conflict and how their lives had been shaped, this was something I could not escape and which I had to deal with sensitively and in relation to the shifting contexts around me. Early on in my research, Krishna, one of the women I lived with told me: “People are scared of what will happen if they speak, but scared if they don’t”. This in many ways encapsulated the dilemma I faced – I wanted people to talk to me because I had started to recognize the importance of documenting stories and giving people the space to talk, and yet in doing so I could risk exacerbating people’s fear and endangering lives. And I found that, at times, people would talk continuously, running over their words and leaving me to try and piece them together, whereas at others, they would say nothing, their suffocating silences filling the room. Overall, I found that people wanted to talk to me. They

---

<sup>35</sup> I discuss the ideas of trauma in relation to the medical framework of PTSD in Chapter Seven.

wanted a chance to tell their story and they wanted me to hear how it was, from their perspective. This is not unusual and many anthropologists and researchers have noted the enthusiastic collaboration of people and their willingness to talk and have their stories heard.<sup>36</sup>

Silences, whispers, rumors, and gossip were all part of the social practices of living and enduring in Batticaloa in which bonds of intimacy and claims to knowledge are intertwined with risk and protecting the self. Recently anthropologists have started to address the significance of rumors, gossip and silence (Stewart & Strathern 2004; Nordstrom 2004); the ways in which the ethnographer also becomes embedded in the contingencies of interactions and how these complicate the process and practice of fieldwork. Although people told me that since the ceasefire they felt more able to talk and share information, and the stories shared with me certainly testified to this, at the same time the increasing levels of violence and fear meant that conversations and activity were punctuated with gaps of silence and secrecy as the learned language of survival. Lawrence notes that in the 1990s people had to 'unlearn' normal reactions for example, not responding to the cries from a neighboring house for fear of surveillance. She states that Batticaloa has become a region of vulnerability to annihilation, where psychological effects of political oppression manifest in 'silencing' and sometimes denial, in learning not to speak and to know what not to know (Lawrence 1999: 198). Silences therefore were endemic in Batticaloa and silence emerged both as a protective strategy and, conversely, as a strategy by which suffering was intensified. The monitoring and silence around violence from all sides, formed a tactic of, and a response to, violence, where the threat could be as powerful as the lived experience (see Galtung 1969). This was reflected also in the experiences of a woman I met in 2005 who was living deep within the border area. She described to me the night she had to sit in the dark behind a locked door as she listened to the cries of her husband and his friend who had been shot while guarding a storehouse nearby. Knowing the extent of the risks involved in going outside and being seen near her husband, she had to wait until morning before she could go to him. By that time, the friend was dead and her husband paralyzed. Enforced silence therefore separated her from her husband in a moment when he needed her the most and prevented her from acting on natural urges and intentions.

### **Strategic silence**

In public spaces, and particularly public gatherings and meetings, very little could be said. When visiting a police station to try and ascertain information about the detention of four

---

<sup>36</sup> See for example Green (1995, 1999), Nordstrom (1997), Das (1990), Tarlo (2003).

young men, I was warned by Loja to stay quiet and not talk back to the officer that we were dealing with. At the time I felt angry with Loja as the officer berated and taunted me by saying “Your country has terrorist problems so you should know what we have to deal with” and, “Why do you British always feel sympathy for the Tamil terrorists?” Moreover, he tried to convince me that all local Tamils were members of the LTTE and therefore could not be trusted. During the time he talked I was waiting for Loja to put him straight, tell him that she had been working with the local communities for years, had dealt with hundreds of cases of unlawful detentions and especially torture and therefore knew what the police were up to. However, the whole time she remained silent, even deferential to the officer. Once we were outside the station and at a safe enough distance to talk, I asked Loja why she had not said anything. Her reply set me straight: “If I had talked back to him there would have been trouble. I might have got him angry and he would have been suspicious of you and me. You have to think about the future, Becky - we might need his help and if I had upset him, now that would never happen”.

This was one of my earliest and most vital lessons in learning to self-censor and remain silent in tense and volatile situations. Where the naive but impassioned defender of human rights in me had wanted to speak my mind, I had been forced to recognize the value of remaining silent and swallowing words in light of future possibilities. More significantly, I could also have put others at risk as well as endangering myself. This difficult experience revealed one of the many fragile paths that people have to negotiate in order to survive in Batticaloa. In his book *An Ordinary Man* (2006), based on his experiences in the Rwanda genocide of 1994, Paul Rusesabagina provides a raw account of the ways in which words and silences can become strategic tools of power in situations of risk.

I used words in many ways during the genocide – to please, intimidate, coax, cajole, and negotiate. I was slippery and evasive when I needed to be. I acted friendly towards despicable people...I had no cause to advance, no ideology to promote beyond that one simple goal. Those words were my connection to a saner world, to life as it ought to be lived. (Rusesabagina 2007: xvii).

### **Embodied silence**

There was also much to be learnt from what people did not say and other forms of communication beyond even silences. For example, one man had agreed to talk with me about his experiences of being arrested and detained by the armed forces during the 1990s, yet for the whole hour that we sat together he barely said more than a few words. However,

while we sat in awkward silence and he fidgeted in the heat, scratching at his arms and legs, he revealed a series of deep scars burrowed into the skin of his ankles and wrists. In the apparently frozen exchange, therefore, he told me far more than any words or even silence could. On another occasion, I was waiting for a friend in Batticaloa hospital when a middle-aged woman was half carried, half dragged into the emergency room and placed on a bed at the other end of the ward. Curtains were quickly drawn around her by a busying group of nurses, but this could not disguise her moans and cries. Through a gap in the curtains I saw her body writhing on the bed. It looked like her skin had been badly burnt and was covered in lesions. Outside the curtain, three young men lingered and seemed to smirk at one another whenever the woman cried out. A nurse, in an oversized but neat white uniform with white ankle socks and shoes was sitting at a large wooden desk by the door. In a large book she recorded the particulars of each of the patients in the room, detailing their injuries and treatment. I kept catching her eye as the woman behind the curtain wailed. As I had left the hospital I paused by the desk and nodding towards the other side of the room asked the nurse if the woman would be alright. “She has burns”, was the simple reply.

The following day I returned to the hospital with a friend to see if we could find out more about this woman, and if possible help. We returned to the emergency room where I had seen the woman the day before, and Krishna explained to the nurse on duty why we were there and that I wanted to check on how this woman was doing. The nurse checked the notebook and looked back at me, face blank. “*Illae*” (No), she stated, “*Inku ondram illae*” (There is nothing here). The nurse I had seen the previous day was also in the room and I asked Krishna to explain to her why I had come back. Again we received a blank look, “If it is not in the book she was not here”.

The evanescence of the woman’s body, thus— its absence despite my having seen it behind the curtain; the lack of notes and recognition from the nurses - meant that she did not exist in certain terms. Going on what sources local told us, it is likely that the woman had been beaten by the Karuna party and that the boys that I saw laughing were TMVP cadres keeping watch. It is likely that it was they who insisted there was no record made of this woman and her injuries. Although much has been written about the difficulties of grieving and finding closure when bodies are absent and fates unknown (see Perera 1995), it is hard to know how we approach the subject of living bodies which exist, yet are denied. While this tells us something about the control of spaces and bodies, and how they are manipulated it also leaves gaps where one feels the need for answers and action.



### **“Doing something at the time”**

Stories such as the one above which reveal the shifts, challenges and often the confusion (of the self and other) in research remind us of the kinds of questions that do not go away. Questions such as whether we should be there (as researchers in the field) in the first place, what our presence means to those around us and, as asked by Krishna at the start of this chapter, what is the *point* of writing after an event has happened rather than trying “to do something *at the time*”? As this chapter has illustrated, despite being able to anticipate a number of the practical difficulties I would face in the field, I could never have imagined the shape of some of the events that took place. Moreover, I certainly did not anticipate the centrality and importance of such challenges (and the opportunities they created in their wake) to the overall process and shape of my research and the insight gained. Having to face the Tsunami and escalating violence and engage with the practical and ethical questions that both engendered undoubtedly enriched my ability to better comprehend and understand the everyday life that I had entered. It is this sense of everyday life and the interplay of the past, present, and future that I now build upon in the next chapter with Meena’s story. Moving between the past and the present and the experiences of things now, tying with how they were then, Meena’s story offers a comparative version of life which allows us to see some of the connections and disjunctures as they have developed through time in the East and through Meena’s life. Reflecting on lives that have come and gone, her narrative is the story of a woman striving to negotiate the spaces that are variously closed, and opened up around her and find her way forward.

### CHAPTER THREE: MEENA'S STORY

During the course of my fieldwork I carried out a number of long-term interviews and discussions with locals to learn about their experiences of living in the East. One of these interviews was with a woman in her late forties named Meena. Meena was a good friend of the women I lived with and when asked, she seemed very happy to talk with me, almost eager to have some time and space where she could sit and converse away from the demands of her daily life. Meena, Krishna (one of my family members who was going to translate for me) and I arranged to meet one afternoon a week in the out-building of a local womens organization. This allowed us some space and privacy where we could talk with little interruption. The building was bare except for a few tired-looking posters pinned to the wooden frames between the wire-mesh windows. One poster was for Women's Independence Day 2001 and another stated the right to live in a violence-free world. Outside, the clatter and banging from the labourers who were working on the house next door would catch in the still, humid heat; smells of sweat, earth and fumes clogging the air. We sat on mats facing one another with a small dictaphone in the middle. Meena would always wear a sari neatly folded and pinned at her shoulder; the tight blouse piece cutting uncomfortably into the flesh on her upper arms. The trail of her sari would pool around her and as she talked she would play with the length of material which was frayed at the edges.



Figure 8: Conversations with Meena (2006)

Meena did not require me to say much before she started talking about her life, beginning from the very day she was born. Hardly pausing for breath, and often talking over Krishna's translation, her memories, feelings, and desires spilled out on to the pages of my notebook in my indecipherable scrawl as I tried to keep up with her pace. Meena followed the central thread of her life, which she framed mainly within a domestic setting and structured by the

societal conventions which created her as a daughter, wife and mother. Starting with her birth, through childhood, adolescence, womanhood and to where she is now, the edges of Meena's world would expand to include her wider family and kin, her community and the population, and then retract to enclose her within her home and on her own, isolated journey. Weaving stories together, Meena revealed a rich tapestry of daily life, which reflected not only her own but many other women's lives in the East. Her story felt important at the time, not just because she told it in such detail, but because it brought into sharper focus the significance of personal experiences and stories as ways of understanding the history of a particular place and people.

As it is a long and richly detailed text, I have divided Meena's story into three parts. The first is from Meena's birth in 1960 up until the end of 1984 when the Special Task Force (STF) who were an elite commando police unit specializing in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations and notorious for its widespread human rights abuses began large scale advances into Batticaloa. The second is from 1986 and the arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) to the late 1990s. The final part picks up in the late 1990s when Meena begins NGO training to support her family and takes us through to when Meena and I completed the interviews in 2006.<sup>37</sup> I have further broken the narrative into sections with subheadings which represent various significant times in Meena's life. In each of these sections, a transcript of Meena's narrative is accompanied by notes, which clarify or explain some of the issues and events raised and referred to by Meena. I have chosen to provide further explanation, which often took place in discussions with Meena and others outside of the interview setting, to ensure the reader does not encounter Meena's story stranded, out of context and without mooring to a wider frame of reference. As such, Meena's words and mine work together to present Meena's experiences of the past as her version of the truth and her interpretation of meaning. It must be noted here that all of the transcript marked as Meena's narrative is written as verbatim, the explanations I offer are based on my choice of texts and information and, while intended to be as unbiased as possible, inevitably reflect my own understanding and the meaning created in the space of dialogue between Meena and myself. The issues surrounding the roles of memory and narrative is discussed in Chapter Four.

---

<sup>37</sup> In order to protect Meena's identity I have removed some of the specific names and references to places and people and used pseudonyms where necessary. X Y and Z are used at various points to replace specific locations, names and other details.

### 3.1 Part One: Growing up in Kokkadichcholai

#### Poverty and marriage

I was born in 1960 in a taxi on the way to my mother's hometown of Munaikadu, Kokkaddichcholai. My mother had got the pains at Kattankudy and so she never got home. My father used to say that I was a special baby because I was born to a Sri Lankan Tamil mother and Indian Tamil father in an auto driven by a Sinhalese person in a Muslim area. My father said that the auto driver had put a ten rupee note into my hand and said, "this one will be a person that will work with the whole community".

I started school during the 1970s after the British had left, at the time when the government asked us all to study Sinhala. At that time the school gave us a small letter asking if we wanted to. I studied close to O Level. I remember they shot the teacher. When I was twelve they gave out coupons at school. Sri Lankan people got yellow and Indians got green. People started to say "*kalatanoi*" (Indian) to me. I fought some of them and got into trouble. The manager (head teacher) was known to my father and he called my father. Then my father beat me. So I asked him (my father) why he came to Sri Lanka and married my mother. He was angry and replied, "OK – you go and ask the government why" This was in 1972.

My mother had married in 1966 and then married again. I don't know what really happened but she took all the children to another man. My father took 4 and I was one of them. We had many difficulties. My father worked in the paper factory but we had no permanent home. Many people made comments. My father left his job and then he became a *pōtiyār* (land owner). We used to join up his sacks in the house – this was his work. People knew he was a speaker on behalf of a local MP and a landowner. So my mother's relatives were happy because they thought he was looking after us well with his jobs. Meanwhile they were angry with my mother so they stopped her coming.

Then my mother's sister's husband died, leaving two children. Relatives thought it was better that they (my aunt and father) married. My father did

not want to but for the children he did it. Then we really had an experience. “*Siththi*” means aunty but it can also mean cruelty. Violence. She was with us for 3 years. Siththi had two children with my father. Then Siththi’s son got married – but his wife died in the Tsunami. He was in Saudi at the time and people said not to inform him of her death. But he heard the message. He later died in an accident in Saudi – the body came back – he was involved in one of the militant groups.

Meena draws attention to the fact those involved in her birth represented all four communities inhabiting the East at that time including: Sri Lankan Tamil; Tamil-speaking Muslim; Sinhalese and, Indian Tamil. The littoral in the Eastern Province is often referred to in poetic terms as *Eluvaankarai* or ‘shore of the rising sun’ and the spatial interspersed of Tamil and Muslim villages along the coastal strip has prompted people to evoke the imagery of a *puttukkulal* or pittu bamboo where the flour and coconut are closely packed together in layers. The historical residence patterns of Muslim, Sinhalese, and Tamils in the Eastern province are subject to much contention and debate, reflecting the wider arguments of nationalist discourses claiming the North-East of Sri Lanka as originally Sinhala-Buddhist or Tamil-Hindu (see for example: Kearney 1987; Arasaratnam 1994; McGilvray & Raheem 2007; Samaraweera 1997).<sup>38</sup> By the time the Portuguese arrived in Batticaloa in the first half of the 17th century, all three major ethnic groups were living in the region; the Sinhalese were scattered in the interior and the Tamils and Muslims were living along the coastal belt and around Batticaloa lagoon. This spatial pattern of ethnic distribution continued largely unchanged in the subsequent years. The Sinhalese population in the former Sinhalese area however increased rapidly due to the government post-independence colonization schemes (Kearney 1987). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century Batticaloa grew rapidly as an administrative, service and trading centre. It became the most populous town along the Eastern coast, surpassing Trincomalee, the largest seaport in Sri Lanka.

---

<sup>38</sup> Arasaratnam (1994: 32) argues that the settlement of the East must have taken place separately from the Tamil colonisation of Northern Sri Lanka and must have originated from parts of Dravidian South Asia. Meanwhile McGilvray & Raheem (2007) point out that a theme that is commonly adhered to, although also not historically established by reliable evidence, regarding the origin of the *Mukkuwa* Tamils is that they are the decedents of *Malabar Mukkuvars* who fled to escape the forcible conversion to Islam, according to Canagarathnam. As a trading community, Muslim settlements were initially transient and Samaraweera argues that consequent writing about Muslim settlements can only be traced back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Samaraweera 1997: 294). A.M. Shukri (1986) however suggests that Arab traders, who came across the Indian Ocean around the 8th century, founded a Mohammadian community through established settlements in the North and East (see also McGilvray & Raheem 2007).

Meena's birthplace, Kokkadaichchola, is part of the Paddipalai division, which until 2007's 'liberation' campaign by the SLA served as the LTTE's Batticaloa-Ampara administrative centre. Home to important temples (*kovils*), even before the area was co-opted as an LTTE strong hold, Kokkadaichchola held historical and cultural significance for the Tamils of the East (McGilvray 2008). Tamil rootedness in the East is linked through the notion of a self-contained autonomous system of villages, presided over by the *ur pōtiyār* – the large land owners, elected from among the *podiyars*. Most *podiyas* were originally *mukkukar* and *vellalar* (the two dominant castes in the Eastern Province) cultivators, although by the end of the nineteenth century Muslim traders had begun to significantly control large areas of land (Whitaker 1999: 9).<sup>39</sup>

The anger that Meena's father harbored towards the government can be explained by the history of South Indian Tamils working on tea estates (known variously as 'Estate Tamils' or 'Plantation Tamils') in the hill country of Sri Lanka. Brought down from Tamil Nadu to work in the plantations in Ceylon in the 1860s, from the moment of their arrival in Sri Lanka, this group of people were discriminated against and exploited by the British colonial establishment, Sinhalese and Tamils alike (Kearney 1987; Daniel 1996).<sup>40</sup> Soon after Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, the Estate Tamils were disenfranchised, which instantly reduced almost a million of them to the rank of stateless persons.<sup>41</sup> Since then, almost half a million have been expatriated to India under various agreements between the governments of India and Sri Lanka, while over a million have been granted Sri Lankan citizenship. In 1975, under sweeping land reforms by the Sri Lankan government, the tea estates were nationalized and many of the Indian Tamils lost their jobs and land. A reduction in rice rations which caused starvation and the violence of the 1977 riots, also drove thousands of Indian Tamils from the hill-country to seek safety in the North-East (K.M. de Silva 1986).<sup>42</sup> With assistance of a number of NGOs, several thousand families were housed in a string of settlements set up all over the North-East. Many found themselves with no access to land or other productive resources, and mostly depend on manual labour. Even though various castes are represented among the Indian Tamils, many Sri Lankan Tamils treat them as belonging to one low-ranking caste (Kearney 1987: 576). This fits with Meena's use of the word,

---

<sup>39</sup> For a more detailed description of *podiyars* see Canagaratnam (1921: 60-65). For land ownership patterns on the East coast see Herring (1972: 99-124) and for a discussion of the social importance of owning land see Whitaker (1999: 9-13).

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed explanation of Tamil women in Sri Lanka's tea plantations and their experiences of kinship, marriage and gender see Philips (2005).

<sup>41</sup> For political-economic accounts of the experiences of Estate Tamils see Daniel (1996) and Hollup (1994).

<sup>42</sup> The communal riots in 1977 were the most serious since 1956, killing over 100 people and displacing about 25,000 (de Silva 1986).

“*Kalatonai*” (Indian) which she told me refers to “someone who has stolen over on a boat”. It appears to have been used derogatorily as a marker of difference and to suggest ‘otherness’. Daniel (1996) cites another word “*vatakkatayan*” (Northerner) which was used as a derogatory term by Jaffna Tamils towards those from the hill-country.

Meena does not offer an explanation as to how her father arrived in the East and became a land owner. Given that Meena was born in 1960 in the East and was attending school by the early 1970s, it seems that her father must have arrived earlier than the groups of Indian Tamils who fled the famine and the 1972 violence in the hill country. This could possibly have been after the 1958 riots, which also included violence in the hill country (Vittachchi 1958). For her father to have married a Sri Lankan Tamil woman is also a point of interest given the violence and isolation of Tamils at that time which would have reduced the opportunity for Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils to interact. The marriage could have been due to Meena’s mother being destitute at the time, Meena’s father being an itinerant trader (who could therefore have visited his wife’s family home), or he may have been a reasonably socially established trader.

### **Facing poverty**

We faced many problems with Siththi. My father was out at work and would only be back once a week. He sent money but she never gave us meals. Siththi took all my mother’s things when she died but she never was with my mother. There was not enough food. She gave us one tiny size bit of rice and left. We went with no meal to school. I did lots in the school; I was good in acting and many things. But back home I had no one to share my feelings with. There was nobody at home. In the meantime my sister was sent by Siththi to do domestic work. My father was always encouraging me – he brought me presents and used to call me ‘doctor’ to make me feel proud.

We lived in a mud house and there was a place where there was lots of soil against the fence. So I wrote things in the soil about my situation. Then one day my father saw this – he did not say anything but he gave the money to Siththi, said he was not coming for seven days and then left. Siththi took the money and went. My father came back early and she was gone. He opened all the cupboards and there was nothing there. All the coupons had been pawned and my earrings sold. Then my father filed a case for divorce and the courts gave the divorce.

Siththi is still alive. She has children, two with my father, and two from before. Two boys have died, one in Saudi and the other while fighting in the LTTE. We were then in X [uncleared area] and we used to see Siththi. Siththi's daughter's husband died in the 1990s. He was fishing and the army killed him. That was the time of the Muslim/Tamil situation – Muslim people killed him. After that my father did not marry. Meantime Siththi sent my sister for domestic work in a teacher's house. My younger sister was also sent. Father did not know. She got the money. In the night if my father asked where they were, she said they were in Kokkadichchola. I got all the beatings from her. One day she hit me and so I pushed her. She then left for five days and did not come back. People knew what was happening but they were frightened to say. When Siththi is number one in the house then people had to support her. She was a good liar.

The “Tamil-Muslim situation” as Meena refers to it is a theme that runs throughout Meena's narrative and which underlies many of the important junctures in the history of the East. This is testimony to the importance of the relationship between the two ethnically distinct communities, which is functional and inter-dependent but also at times, steeped in tension and hostilities. The two groups have both suffered immensely over the many years of conflict and share a history different to any other part of the island. In the 1950s, the appeal of a unified Tamil state being pushed by Tamil politicians in the North and South caught on rapidly with a large number of Muslim adherents. This Tamil ideology however, was rooted in Jaffna and the North, and revolved around a Northern leadership, which seemed to marginalize Tamils in the East and overlook their unique and separate identity (McGilvray 1998). Over time, Muslims also distanced themselves further from the Tamil cause. An independent Tamil Eelam was generally not in the interests of the Muslims as they would be a minority there, which would in turn reduce the bargaining power they held in Sri Lankan politics.

The situation that Meena describes, of Siththi's son-in-law working in Saudi Arabia, was not uncommon. Fuglerud (1998) states that the historical importance of migration in the Tamil areas stems from it being one of the few, and therefore major, forms of increasing capitalism. There has always been considerable migration, and from their heartland on the Jaffna Peninsula, the Sri Lankan Tamils made routes of migration, from the earliest times, to other parts of the island. The entire Northern Province had a dense concentration of Tamil



populations, and from there they moved to the Eastern Province, especially towns with a rural hinterland such as Trincomalee and Batticaloa (Wilson 2000). A large number also made their way to Colombo in search of jobs, and also to Kandy, the second largest city. McDowell (1996: 69) observes, 'a spirit of migration, mostly by middle class Tamils, became built into Tamil cultural aspirations' which reflected the significance of migration as central to Tamils and Tamil identity. This can also be attributed to the fact that Tamils in the Jaffna Peninsula had benefitted greatly from the American and British Christian missions, who had provided excellent schools and teaching, and therefore had enabled them to hold prosperous and important positions of employment. This is often cited as underlying the sense of isolation that Batticaloa Tamils felt from the Northern Tamils due to such discrimination and subsequent marginalization.

Migration has been an aspiration for those who dreamt of social mobility and progress and still the average adult and school leaver looks to emigration as the desired goal. Daniel and Thangarajah (1995) describe this type of migration as the first of three phases: phase one comprises mainly upper and middle class Tamils leaving Sri Lanka after Independence in 1948 who were then unable to return through their fear of the 1956 Language Bill and increasing discrimination. Phase two is classed as mainly students who, in reaction to restricted and discriminatory educational opportunities, sought the chance to study and work outside Sri Lanka. Phase three is described as 'refugees' – leaving after the 1979 Prevention Of Terrorism Act (POTA), the 1983 ethnic riots and the continually worsening situation in Sri Lanka. While Daniel and Thangaraja's model gives us an idea of the types of migration that have taken place, based on the Tamil population's reaction to changes in Sri Lanka, it also simplifies a complex and multidimensional picture of diverse experiences and understandings which include multiple displacements. Moreover, it fails to account for the thousands of economic migrants to the Middle East. Sriskandarajah (2004, 2005) notes that Sri Lanka has one of the world's highest rates of voluntary short-term labour migration and that more than 500,000 workers are estimated to be working predominantly as labourers and domestic workers mostly in the Middle East. The vast majority of these are Sinhalese from poor, rural regions in the South, however, a number are also from the North and East, including Muslims displaced from the North in 1990 (ibid). Although this does not fall under the category of forced migration, the fact that these migrants have sought work abroad as a result of poor economic opportunities mainly due to uneven development and that some flee threat and intimidation means that it cannot be entirely separated from the effects of conflict.

## **1976-1983: Marriage and adulthood**

Then in 1976 there was this boy who had seen me in a drama at school (step father's cousin's friend) and came to my house saying he wanted to marry me. By now my elder sister was grown up. The boy talked to my sister and they decided that since the family have nothing we should marry. I was fifteen years. At that time I had no proper clothes as my step mother drank all our money. But my sister said I should get married. That time though I did not even have a bra or vest and my knickers were made from old cloth. The boy started visiting more and when I explained to him our family situation he said he would stay with us. But his mother was not happy with that, as we owned nothing. He fought with his mother. One day my step mother took us to the police station. It was 1976, March 18<sup>th</sup>. She made an entry of marriage in front of the police. Police advised my husband that I was good and to let me study well. But my father did not know about this and was upset at first. But he was then OK. Me and my husband, my younger and elder sister all lived in X [uncleared area]. My husband was good and supportive and used to let me just play. We did not know what to do...[indicating that she meant sexual intercourse] and so we would eat then just sleep.

April 1976. New Year. My husband's father came and asked us to come to the house. That day my mother-in-law put a white cloth on a mat and talked to her son. That was the first night we slept together. We did not really know what to do or what happened. I thought my time [period] had come so I washed the cloth. Then the mother checked the cloth. I was sixteen and in June I found I was pregnant. We made a small hut in his family land and stayed there. But my mother-in-law was a problem and only gave me minimum food. I was young and I would cry. After my marriage I stopped visiting people. The culture meant I should stay with my husband – but I did not know what to do. I used to play with my husband's younger sisters like a child. When I was six months pregnant my husband stopped being with me. He would go away for one week for work and come back on the Sunday. The same life as I had with my father. At this time my husband's father would cause trouble for me and he even tried to abuse me but I got away. I was scared to be near him.

My baby was born in 1977 on March 8<sup>th</sup> – he was a month early. A boy was born and my father was happy, as it was all girls in my family. We called him Prabhakaran. But after sixteen days he died. I had leaked milk at five months and people had said there was something wrong. When the child died I sent a message to my husband but he did not come. My mother-in-law came and told people that my child was not her son's but my father-in-laws'. Someone tried to hit me at the funeral.

I lived with my father and he lived with his mother after that. But after one year my husband fought with his mother and so came back to me. He started to bring money and life was better. I became pregnant again but at six months I miscarried. After two-three months, I was pregnant again and I had a daughter in 1979. I moved to X [a cleared area] and took government land and built a hut. I used to visit my father and elder sister who were now married. I also got a job in Sarvodaya as a nursery teacher. I had fifteen days of training.<sup>43</sup> My mother-in-law looked after my child and then the child started nursery school.

In 1980 July 22<sup>nd</sup> my father died from cancer – at that time two of my sisters were not married – and this made me feel sad about his death because he had expectations of us all being married. I think he knew he had cancer. He had always advised me and I really felt the loss of him. I used to talk about politics with my father and so I knew all of the political history. I knew about what the British people did – separating the country and being in charge. My father said that they had done some good things and that if I could learn English it would be good for me. But I had no chance to do this. He had given me a name that meant 'God's child' - he always looked for meaning. After he died, whatever experience or struggle I was facing, father always came in my dream. Then after his death my last sister married - so now all the girls were married. In 1981 my son was born. He was the fourth child but only the second to survive.

Marriage patterns among Tamil (and Muslim) population of the Eastern region the according to McGilvray (1984: 43) follow a 'sort of shifting matri-uxorilocal pattern', with the bride and groom tending to live in the bride's natal house for a period of between six months and

---

<sup>43</sup> The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is one of the largest NGOs in Sri Lanka in terms of the scale and territorial reach of its activities as well as in terms of its public profile (Orjuela 2004).

two years.<sup>44</sup> The transmission of family property from parents to daughters in the form of dowry, constitutes what McGilvray (ibid), following Goody, calls a 'pre-mortem matrilineal inheritance' with most of the wealth of the natal house (including the house itself) generally making up the dowry of the elder sisters, and with brothers obligated to acquire wealth and build 'dowry-houses' (*ciitanam vittu*) for younger sisters. The preference is for bilateral cross-cousin marriage (Tambiah 1973:127). The most distinctive aspect of East coast matrilineality, however, lies in the exogamous sub-categories created within the endogamous caste category by a system of dispersed named matriclans known as *Kuti* (McGilvray 1973, 1982). According to McGilvray 'the *Kuti* is a named unilineal (matrilineal) descent unit the members of which see themselves in principle as kinsmen but have no conception of any specific genealogical connections which might unify the entire group as a lineage' (McGilvray 1973: 9). In other words, *Kuti* is a clan system, which has forged strong bonds between Tamil speaking people, including Muslims but with the exception of Christian groups in some places on the East coast, including the Portuguese Burghers and other Catholic inhabitants of Batticaloa town, and is based upon the importance of the *tay vali*, (mother way). As McGilvray (ibid) argues, the *kuti* 'serves to regulate marriage but also ties everyone into a system of descent-group, honours and privileges'. This is the major difference between Jaffna Tamils and Batticaloa Tamils; there is no equivalent *Kuti* system in Jaffna, which has a patrilineal structure (Sivatamby 1984; McGilvray 1982, 2008; Tambiah 1986). The over-riding principle of the *Kuti* is that a person has to marry outside of their own since members of the same *Kuti* have a strong bond more like brother and sister.

According to McGilvray (1982), the advantage of this marriage structure is that it preserves tradition-based Tamil caste and matri-clan 'rights' and 'shares' which often pertain to temple administration and religious rituals while tending to reduce dowry expectations between contracting families due to their level of connectedness (1989: 199; 2008). Land holding Tamil *Mukkuvars* and *Vellalars* are an important characteristic of the community and according to Ruwanpura (2006: 96), partially a spill over from the caste system, which produces a hierarchical system for access to economic resources. Since the caste system is

---

<sup>44</sup> The matrilineality of the East coast was in fact noted, by Yalman before McGilvray, however, McGilvray disputes Yalman's notion that *kuti* hypergamy was a signal of importance to East coast matrilineality given that he could find no evidence of hypergamy among *Kuti*. See Yalman (1971: 325-331); McGilvray (1982: 46-47). There is a large body of comparative kinship analysis in Sri Lanka and South Asia more generally. For example Agarwal (1990, 1996); Dumont (1957, 1966, 1970, 1983); Good (1980, 1981 and 1991); Leach (1961); McGilvray (1982, 1998, 2008); Tambiah (1973); Trautmann (1981); Trawick (1992) and Yalman (1967). For a detailed examination of the practices of kinship and household structures in Eastern Sri Lanka see McGilvray (1982, 2008); Ruwanpura (2006).

not found among Muslims this is an important difference between the two communities in the region.

Ruwanpura (2006: 98) notes that while the matrilineal customs, with the emphasis being on the provision of adequate dowries for daughters, should place Eastern Tamil women in a strong negotiating position in intra-household relations, however, this is dependant upon the financial situation of the family and the area which in turn determines whether the dowry is at all possible. In Meena's case it appears that she did not have a dowry and thus her husband's family were unhappy about the union since they would not gain materially. As Ruwanpura (ibid) notes 'matrilineal inheritance patterns are likely to benefit women from land-holding classes more than women in poverty-level groups'. This also reveals the reality of kinship practices as opposed to the desired structure in the East, whereby the everyday lived experiences of poverty and marginalization were important factors in affecting relations. This is supported by Lawrence's (1997) observations in Batticaloa in the 1990s in which she points out that despite the prevalence of strong female networks family structures and living patterns have been irrefutably fragmented by forced displacement and killings. Furthermore, in spite of the existence of matrilineal practices patriarchal institutions also determine gender relations. Ruwanpura's (2006: 98) study points out that since men are traditionally the visible agents of the social community in Eastern Sri Lanka, intra-household relations are shaped by 'the coexistence of patriarchal institutions and matrilineal structures'.

Meena's comment about the British "separating the country" refers to the way in which prior to colonization Sri Lanka had existed as a series of regional kingdoms, ruled by affluent kings. The maritime districts including the Tamil areas of the North and East were occupied first by the Portuguese who arrived in 1505, and from the late 1660s by the Dutch. The Portuguese and Dutch administered the Tamil areas as a separate entity, to other areas and kingdoms on the island. When the British arrived, however, they pushed for a centralized approach to power, which brought all of the kingdoms under one central rule (Wilson, 2000). It is argued that by doing so the British cemented previously unacknowledged fault lines by creating three administrative systems, a Sri Lankan Tamil region in the North, and two Sinhalese (upper and lower) in the centre and Southern coastal areas (Tennent 1971; Wilson 2000).

### **1983: The Sinhalese and the rise of the LTTE**

In 1982 the problems really started. We knew that a TELO leader was in Kalmunai prison and being tortured. It was a new experience for all the people and the village people all got together to discuss the incidents. We did not know very much about the situation at that time. In 1983 the Sarvodaya president came to Batticaloa and then went back to Colombo. We tried to listen to his visit on the radio but we only got sad songs. That's when we knew of the 1983 riots. People came back from Colombo and we heard. We were confused and very tense. Army were on the main road. We had heard about PLOTE and TELO then because my father had told me about the groups. But it was only at this time that the other movements became known. I had read a book about the movements. We heard that PLOTE had separated into two – into the LTTE and PLOTE over a girl. There had been a shoot out because this girl loved the PLOTE leader and then they did something against the LTTE. So then there was a fight between the two and the girl got shot.

The LTTE was not in public at this time. There was one guy, he was a *dhobi* – he was around the village and trying to do a fishing business and other business for the LTTE. But in the village people never knew that he was from the LTTE. He moved with the people. The LTTE members never introduced themselves as LTTE. But the LTTE did have support in the village. At that time it was made up of a lot of people from Jaffna. We heard about Kittu appa who was killed by the Indian army. He got caught by the IPKF at sea – and in prison there was 7 members – all top LTTE. While in prison the LTTE put cyanide in their food and they all died. IPKF said it was not them but the LTTE denied too.

The two stories involving the LTTE are variations of particular incidents which took place between the late 1970s and 1993 and appear to have either taken on new form and meaning as they have filtered down through the village or have become merged together as Meena recalls what took place. Although Meena's account is at variance in terms of specific detail and chronology with a number of other reports the information she provides signposts a number of significant shifts in the structure of the LTTE and subsequently the shape of the conflict. The incident involving the LTTE and PLOTE leader is most commonly reported as a quarrel between Uma Maheswaran, (alias Muhundan), who joined the LTTE in 1977 and

became regional commander of the *Vanni* (Northern region) and Prabhakaran, over a female LTTE cadre called Urmila (Swarmy 1994). The quarrel eventually led to Muhundan leaving the LTTE to form another Tamil militant group, the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) in 1980 (ibid).

The second incident appears to refer to an event in October 1987 when a number of LTTE cadres travelling in a boat off the coast of Point Pedro in the North were apprehended by the Sri Lankan navy and arrested. When they were about to board a flight to Colombo, all of the cadres swallowed cyanide capsules, apparently on the orders of Prabhakaran. Subsequently the LTTE launched an attack on the Indian troops who were stationed in Sri Lanka at the time as part of the Indo-Lanka accord (see pp. 83-92) and a new phase of war began. This particular incident, however, did not include Sathasivam Krishnakumar, alias "Kittu appa", the Jaffna regional commander for the LTTE, who died in a separate incident at sea in January 1993, when the Indian navy intercepted their vessel on the Indian ocean (Swarmy 1994).

The stories of all of three men, Prabhakaran, Muhundan and Kittu reflect the increasing active and dominant involvement of Tamil youth in Tamil politics. Frustrated by the failure of the older generation of Tamil leaders representing TULF (a coalition of pre-existing Tamil parties representing the formerly conservative upper-middle class strata of Tamil society) to accomplish change in the political process, they increasingly looked for alternative options (Kearney 1987). A new model for political activism had been set by the Sinhalese, Maoist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrection in 1971 (Hoole *et al* 1990), and for Tamil youth a nationalist response to repression by the Sinhala-Buddhist state, offered a viable, exciting alternative (Bose 1994).<sup>45</sup> When, a year later in 1972, an overtly Sinhala and Buddhist constitution was adopted, followed by the university standardization scheme, which significantly reduced the number of Tamil-speaking students entering university (Nissan 1998: 9), Tamil youth in the North of the country formed the first of many Tamil militant groups.<sup>46</sup> From the late 1970s a large number of Tamil militant

---

<sup>45</sup> Under the leadership of Rohana Wijeweera, the JVP was popular primarily among the unemployed and rural youth, capitalizing on the alleged 'class betrayal' of the existing leftist-coalition in their collaboration with the government, and on its lack of a revolutionary purpose (Hoole *et al* 1990). The JVPs violent rhetoric became a public campaign as poorly armed youths rose up against the government. A state of emergency was imposed and the government forces had within a few weeks ruthlessly repressed the insurrection (ibid).

<sup>46</sup> Between 1973 and 1976 a number of schemes involving various combinations of standardization and district quotas were experimented with in order to try and rectify the disparity existing among Tamil students, Sinhalese students, those from urban areas, and those from rural areas. However, rather than improve the opportunities of geographically disadvantaged students generally, the schemes overwhelmingly discriminated against Sri Lankan Tamils (Nissan 1998: 9).

groups emerged, of which five, including the LTTE, were the most prominent. By the late 1980s they had established themselves as one of the world's most violent rebel movements.<sup>47</sup> Led by Prabhakaran (also written as Pirabakaran), the LTTE developed into a tightly structured and strictly controlled organization, with a two-tier structure: a military wing and a subordinate political wing, which was overseen by a central governing committee and several subdivisions. These included, the Sea Tigers, the Air Tigers, an elite fighting wing, a suicide commando unit (the Black Tigers), a highly secretive intelligence wing, and a political office.

The groups differed significantly in terms of strategies, ideologies and in terms of the areas from which they initially drew their support. What began with small-scale assassinations, bank robberies and ambushes of police and military personnel in the North, over time, gathered strength, particularly after widespread government-sponsored anti-Tamil riots in July 1983. Eastern Tamil youth were initially unsure of the Northern dominance of the LTTE as reflected in Meena comment, "it was made up of a lot of people from Jaffna". However, following the violence against Tamils in 1983 and subsequent mass displacement of Tamil people, as well as the establishment of the ruthless rule of the STF in 1984 support from the East coast dramatically increased.

Meena highlights the 1983 anti-Tamil riots as a significant moment for people in Batticaloa, in particular bringing the contours of evolving Tamil militancy more sharply into focus. 1983 is most often demarcated as the 'official' start of the Sri Lankan conflict, when in response to the murder of thirteen Sinhalese soldiers by the LTTE: a wave of ethnic violence engulfed Colombo and spread to many parts of Sri Lanka. Tensions had already been building up for a while, and many observers argue that the riots, if not actively orchestrated were definitely not prevented from escalating by the government of the time (Hoole 2001: 69-82; Tambiah 1986, 1996; ICES 2003).<sup>48</sup> Over three thousand Tamils died and countless were displaced inside and outside the country (Tambiah, 1996; Nissan, 1996). Refugees streamed back to the North and the East and it is reported that in response, the militant organizations received thousands of new recruits and transformed over night (ibid).

---

<sup>47</sup> The LTTE emerged when members of the Tamil Student Union, (then known as the Tamil New Tigers – TNT) asserted themselves as the sole representatives of the Tamil population.

<sup>48</sup> The widespread use of voter lists for the identification of Tamil-inhabited houses seem to point at active complicity from elements in the state apparatus. Several prominent people linked to the government were leading mobs. Minister Cyril Matthew, a staunch Sinhala-nationalist, was seen organising an attack against a prominent Tamil business (Hoole 2001: 110-111).



## Anti-Tamil riots

At that time of the riots, lots of Sinhalese people started moving to Colombo. We had lots of sayings about them and we would say that the Sinhalese pull the sarong differently because they are cruel people. So we would say this is *our* country. There were lots of Sinhalese people in Batticaloa and though we talked about them (the Sinhalese) as killers in Colombo we did care about the Batticaloa ones. We advised them to leave. There were Sinhala schools in areas between Kayankerny, Eravur and Batticaloa. The Sinhalese did fishing and coconut cultivation. They were good business people and we had a good working relationship. But when we heard the stories of all the cutting in Colombo though the Tamils told the Sinhalese people to go, don't stay here. Mostly those who left did not come back. But still their farms are here.

Meena's comments about the Sinhalese in Batticaloa in 1983 are interesting given that the most common version of events in the 1983 riots tends to focus on the growing hostility and tension between Sinhalese and Tamils in the South and rarely considers what was happening in the East where communities were living tightly inter-dispersed. While direct violence did not break out in the East during the 1983 riots this is not to say that relations were purely harmonious. There is evidence for example of violence between Sinhalese and Tamils in the East in the 1958 anti-Tamil unrest which led to an anti-Sinhala response in Batticaloa (Vittachi 1958) although this does not seem to have permanently disrupted communal relationships in the area.<sup>49</sup> Although many of the Sinhalese in the Eastern region were brought in through government colonization schemes, a proportion of Sinhalese would have populated the region long before this. Sinhalese coastal settlements in the East for example have extended links to the region since deep sea fishing is dependant on the weather patterns of the monsoon and thus migration between the South-West and North-East is commonplace creating interaction and co-existence in the fishing community (Ruwnapura 2006: 74). Like Tamils in the Eastern region, Sinhalese communities also primarily depended on farming and agriculture, either paddy cultivation or *chena* (slash-and-burn) cultivation and also were involved in trading, particularly in Batticaloa town (ibid). However, the deliberate attempts by the state to tap the agricultural potential of the region for Sinhalese settlers played a

---

<sup>49</sup> The anti-Tamil riots in 1958 occurred mainly in the irrigation schemes in the North of the Trincomalee District and in Polonnaruwa, however revenge attacks against Sinhalese took place in the North and the East. They followed unrest over the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957 that would have made Tamil the administrative language in the Tamil-speaking North and East regions but was cancelled under pressure from Sinhala nationalists, UNP party members and particularly Buddhist monks (ibid).

significant role in creating tensions and unease between communities (Peebles 1990: 34). Based on post-Independence Sinhalese chauvinist politics, the schemes which were implemented from the late 1940s onwards were designed to shift populations from the over-populated Wet Zones of the south primarily to the sparsely-populated Eastern Dry Zone, in what Tamils and Muslims viewed as an attempt at a 'Sinhalisation of the East'. The Eastern Province contained large areas of fertile and economically exploitable land and the strategic port of Trincomalee. Encroachment of settler communities drastically altered the ethnic composition in the East and caused much alarm amongst native Tamil populations (ibid).

After the LTTE entered the village then the caste problem was reduced. They told people that there should be no caste system. Before this, there were a lot of caste discriminations. The barbers were the low caste and the laundry castes were a bit up and then there were higher castes. The barbers could not come in to other areas and there was no inter-marriage. Now there is intermarriage and the washing caste is less. The high caste, the *Kalinga* (*Kāliṅkā*) (which I am) went abroad and many sold their land to other castes.<sup>50</sup> So then the washer caste became more united and the *Kalinga* more divided. An example of how the LTTE operated – the barber caste found a *pillaiyar* statue and they took it to their land and said they wanted to build a temple.<sup>51</sup> But that meant that then the washing people could not wash there. It became a fight. Someone went to the LTTE and the LTTE called all the castes. People said that whatever they say we will accept. So the LTTE said to put the statue in the Sarvodaya nursery land. So the land where the dhobis wash is still there but now they are not doing it. They wash at home.

One of the ways in which the LTTE gained support was through appealing to and mobilizing traditionally degraded and peripheral social groups within the Tamil formation, such as women, 'low castes', and peasants. Some suggest that the intention of the LTTE was to 'balance out' a hierarchical and oppressive society by breaking the rigidity of the class system and gender divisions (Bose 1994). Although an important element of caste is that they are hierarchically ranked, McGilvray (2008) has pointed out that the precise ranking of

---

<sup>50</sup> Although Meena uses the term "Kalinga" (*Kāliṅkā*) to describe her caste, I have only been able to find references to it as a clan or *kuti* name. According to McGilvray this term refers to one of the "*Mukkuvar Kutis*". *Kāliṅkā*, writes McGilvray 'was a medieval kingdom in Orissa and also a famous name in Sri Lankan dynastic history (see McGilvray 2008: 173-175).

<sup>51</sup> Pillaiyar, also known Ganesh is one of the best-known and most widely worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheon.

castes within clusters of roughly similar status is ambiguous and to some extent variable over time and place and in Eastern Sri Lanka as previously noted, caste and matrilineality played into one another. The ranking of the castes has its reflection in ritual roles and responsibilities relating to Hindu and Buddhist temples: to some extent, ideas of purity and pollution play a role here, but local (and colonial) political dynamics are equally important (McGilvray 1982, 2008; Dirks 2008; Whitaker 1999).<sup>52</sup> Many local stories describe various incidents such as the one Meena mentions in which the LTTE intervened in village disputes caused by caste. However, an argument more in accordance with the LTTE ideologies of a homogenized Tamil community is that they did not fight caste because it was injustice but because it divided the Tamil community, which they needed to be unified (Hoole *et al* 1990). The claim to the dissolution of caste in Tamil areas in Sri Lanka is also not one that can be tested given the extensive erosion of the social structure and networks in villages and neighbourhoods during war-time.

### **1984 – 1986 The Special Task Force (STF)**

During that period, the movements were very active. Whatever house you visit at that time, at least one person will be a member of one group. At that time the LTTE did not feel so special – each one was the same. In 1984 the army started to check ID cards more. People felt this change, they were scared, and because of the fears many young formed with the movement for protection. Then they started doing round-ups in the night. When they came to your house they would ask “*thampi irukaa?*” (“Is your younger brother here?”).<sup>53</sup> Because of this many joined the movement. They put up a sentry point too. There were two big officers there. The village people named one “axe man” and the other one “jasmine bud”. The second one was called that because of a pendant he had on a chain. When “axe man” came out at least twenty boys would be taken...and finished. During the time that the LTTE moved amongst the people in the East and controlled them the oppression through the caste system was minimal.

---

<sup>52</sup> Between independence and the country-wide escalation of violence in 1983, the practices of caste were studied in great detail by many social scientists such as Ryan (2004 [1953]), Yalman (1971), Pfaffenberger (1982), McGilvray (1982, 1983, 2008), Dart (1985), Whitaker (1999) and Roberts (1997 and 1998a).

<sup>53</sup> Young men composed the most frequently sought after category in the Tamil population. The term “*thambi*” (younger brother) refers to younger males – not only immediate family but also in a more general term for younger male compatriots.

In 1984, the STF came to Batticaloa. I had another son on November 17<sup>th</sup>. When I was in hospital with the new baby for the first time in my life I saw the STF. This was because someone was injured – a famous person was injured – and the STF brought him to hospital. STF at that time were so frightening and we were scared of them. They would immediately take action. I was with my baby and very frightened. I knew of the army but not the STF. My husband was arrested in 1984. I was seven months pregnant. He was in Karadiyanaru camp. The women used to go to the camp to look for their husbands. One STF had a palmyrah stick and he used to beat the women calling them “*Puli amma*” (Tiger mothers).<sup>54</sup> I was pregnant at that time and I had to move from the line so that he wouldn’t hit my stomach. One STF picked up a stone and said “*Kuti Puliya*” (Little Tiger) and he threatened to throw the stone at my stomach. I was separated from the other women at that point as they were in the other side. However, one other army man observed me and called me over. He asked why I was there. I explained and he asked my husband’s name. He then went to check. He came back and said that he was in there and I could take him. My husband was beaten so badly that he could not walk straight. I put him on the bus and told the bus driver not to take money from him. My husband said to me “*If I did not have you or child I would join them*” (meaning the LTTE). He told me that they beat him with an S-Lon pipe and then burnt plastic shopping bags and put them on their bodies.<sup>55</sup> It happened in the night. It would be the lower-level people who would do this, he said. He told me all the torture; they would rub chilli powder into the wounds. There was one officer asking questions and a boy was screaming because the officer had a pen in his ear and he kept slamming it. They would also hit people on their heels. They would tie their hands and hang them up. They did not take women at that time but most women were at the camps looking for their husbands and they got beaten.

---

<sup>54</sup> The *Palmyrah* palm is often described as the single most useful plant in the Northern and Eastern region of Sri Lanka. It is easily cultivated and also found to grow wild. Cultivation requires little labour in planting the nuts and protecting them from cattle till they grow above reach. The tragic irony here is that the *palmyrah* was ‘useful’ as an instrument of violence against the Tamil people.

<sup>55</sup> S-Lon pipes are plastic pipes that are used for construction. However, the STF fill them with sand and use them to for beatings; the advantage being that the body would suffer multiple internal injuries but the skin would not break and therefore there would be little visible evidence of the brutality (Daniel 1996).

According to UTHR reports, from the end of 1984 the Sri Lankan forces began large-scale massacres of Tamils in the East. During this time the LTTE had been fighting to assert themselves as the sole representatives of the Tamil population by targeting previously fraternal Tamil militant groups, excising the larger portion of the Tamil militant strength in the East. The LTTE achieved their dominance in 1986 after decimating other Tamil militant groups (Hoole *et al* 1990). In response the STF advanced further into the Eastern Province and entered areas such as Kokkadichcholai, where Meena was born. In January 1987 the STF carried out what became known as ‘the prawn massacre’ of 120 civilians: men, women and children. A number of women were also raped and beaten and many people injured (Trawick 2007; UTHR 1991). Around the same time, the Batticaloa Peace Committee, initially composed of elder citizens in Batticaloa, was formed. The committee originally formed to deal with the number of Tamils displaced from the South in the 1983 riots, however as violence and killings increased they started to keep records of the incidents and made regular representations with regard to missing persons. In August 1990, the Peace Committee sent letters to the military authorities in Batticaloa, one with a list of over 400 missing persons in the Batticaloa area.

One day I was teaching and the army came and took a man. He had a 14-day-old child. His wife was behind the army begging them to leave him. The next day they shot him. Another time there was a boy who had been in PLOTE and left. They caught him in the village and took a stick and with his underwear they hung him from the stick. This was our experience during this time. It was our life.

The army and the STF had assumptions that the movement boys won’t drink alcohol, won’t marry, won’t drink soda, smoke, or take betel. So then at this time all of our young boys started to do these things so that they would not look like the movement. Then my family moved to an LTTE area. At this time PLOTE and TELO joined with the army and so they were with them. Before this they had all lived in the same areas so they knew each other. So when the people joined with the army they were able to point out the LTTE families.

There was one experience in my village - when the army was coming on a round up everyone would ask the boys to hide. One *amma* told her son to run – but the army caught him. They kept him in one place and then went to this *amma* and asked for her boy. She said I have no son. So then they

brought the son in front of her and said “So he’s not your son?” and they shot him. From 1985 there was at least one body every day.



Figure 9: Sri Lankan army in Eastern Sri Lanka (2005)

## **3.2 Part Two: Widowhood and Occupation of the East**

### **The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)**

In 1986 I had my third child, a girl. My husband was always frightened and he told me that he should take everyone to the jungle. He said don't send the children to school. I fought with him. He wouldn't go for work and wanted to sell the land. At that time there was no income from Sarvodaya but I had been getting Rs100 a month. I did not have enough food when pregnant and no clothes. I only had an underskirt and sarong. So when they did a round up I had to cover myself with a towel. The army felt sorry for me so in the next round up they said not to come but they took my husband. They said that they won't hurt my husband but I had to go tomorrow to get him. The others in the village had to go and they came back angry with me. I had no sari and I had to borrow one from my neighbour. The next day they released him. But every time they came they took him; there was always a problem with my husband. There was no food and my husband started drinking. He had all this body pain and so he drank. Most men drank alcohol at night. I had a nutrition problem and I

lost my teeth. The doctor advised me that I did not have enough calcium. I tried to pull one tooth out myself. At thirty-two I had all my teeth pulled.

I wanted to go early to the hospital to have my baby. I was frightened because of the situation and the children were scared so I thought it was better to go one month early to hospital. We would be able to get food then too. This was 1986 in November. In the meantime, in the village my husband's mother pawned the land to others and bought food items and took her son [Meena's husband] and my children and went to the LTTE jungle area. They had no ID cards.

My baby was born. Some other lady from the village was in the hospital so I joined her and went home. No one was there. I went to my step mother's house but no one was there. Because of the problems I had with my stepfather I did not want to stay there. During that time there was no food for me, only bread and manioc. But there was a family planning place and if you went for the meeting you got Rs20 so I went and with the money bought some milk for my baby, as I had no breast milk. But then there was no more programmes and so nothing. I managed to pass a message to my husband about the baby and asked him to come. But he asked me to go to that area, I managed to look after the child alone for five months but then for two days the child had no food and died. Just before the baby died one of the EROS members was working in the area and he asked me to give him some tuition. When the child died he gave me Rs600 to bury the child.

Then I started to make *vadai* to sell in the village. I went back to my land and made a small hut and was living alone.<sup>56</sup> My land hadn't been sold but pawned so I took it back. My mother-in-law had said that my last child was not her son's and that is why she died. During this period we lost two sister's husbands. They were missing. When the first husband went missing he had gone for work but he did not come back. He had two children. After three months the second sister's husband was taken. He was twenty years old. He was taken by the police and kept in Boosa for

---

<sup>56</sup> *Vadai* is a form of snack in Sri Lanka and South India made from fried chickpeas or lentils, vegetables and chilli.

six months.<sup>57</sup> Then he was released and he started work as a carpenter. Then again one day he went for work and disappeared. That was what happened – you got taken once then that meant they would probably take you again and you never knew if you would come out.

By this time my husband had returned with my children. They all had caught scabies. I told him “leave me and my children and go” as I did not want him, only the children. At that time I had a Sarvodaya placement. My husband told them at work that I did not want him and they all spoke to me and finally persuaded me to take him back. In the meantime my stepfather, my mother’s new husband was not giving any food even to his own children. They all came to me and complained. One day the stepfather got angry because they came to me and he came to my house and hit my son. Then my son took a stone ready to throw it at the stepfather.

The death of her baby due to starvation and her own lack of nutrition and good health reveal the extent to which mothers like Meena struggled without support and health care provisions in Eastern Sri Lanka. A study by the Asian Development Bank ([ADB] 1999:3) noted that the Sri Lankan government’s expenditure on social services, which had already been reduced in the mid-1980s in order to implement structural adjustment programs, was further cut back by the increasing financial cost of the war in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. The Bank concluded that the financial burden of the protracted conflict and the subsequent diversion of funds away from the social sector has resulted in a ‘perceptible deterioration in the quality of health and education services and therefore in the quality of life of women and their families.’

Prior to this, the government had embarked on an expansion of the state sector and creation of a welfare state in the 1950s and 1960s as a mechanism for alleviating poverty. It was considered that the provision of welfare to the people was a prime duty of the government and during the periods before and immediately after independence, government policies were directed towards the provision of welfare services, subsidies on food and services and inputs for agriculture. However, Hettige (2000: 10) argues that such political patronage

---

<sup>57</sup> One of the largest army camps in the South of Sri Lanka is located in Boosa, on the outskirts of Galle. Many men and women who were arrested and detained were taken to Boosa, which became notorious for the torture of prisoners. It was very difficult for family members to find out what had happened to their loved ones since travel to the South was difficult and getting information about those taken by the army even harder. Many who were taken to Boosa never came out (UTHR 1992a).



created a deeply rooted perception among ordinary people of themselves as passive receivers of the state, which was reinforced with the introduction of foreign aid and NGOs from the 1970s onwards. The first modern civil society organizations were Christian, working in the social sphere. These were soon to be followed by similar Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim organizations such as Sarvodaya (where Meena worked), as part of an expansion of NGOs and civil organizations working for peace, human rights, and democratic restructuring. (Orjuela 2005: 4; Saravanamuttu 1998). At a community level, traditional funeral and village societies remain important in local processes of social organization and form around issues of common concern. Nevertheless, most locally based organizations have been established by and depend upon state resources or foreign aid (see Mayer 2000: 167).

Then I decided to move back to X [uncleared area]. Me, my husband and three children, stepfather and his four boys and two girls (five children from his first marriage). We moved and my husband's attitude changed. He would give food and everything because in the landlord's house they would check the money and everything. I knew the landlady (from Jaffna) and trusted her. So everything was OK. I felt close to her – and particularly because one day I had a dream that the landlord was hit in the paddy field and injured...three days later that happened.

My two sisters were widows. One was without children so she went off for domestic work in Kalmunai. The other had two children so she stayed with our older sister. One of those children died in the prawn farm massacre in Kokkadichchola. That is why I never go back to Kokkadichchola. But my older sister's husband was bad to her and hit her. She complained to me so I said to come and stay with us. So then I had my other sister with us too. This was still the IPKF time so it was good that we were together as women were scared to stay alone at that time. The IPKF had a bad reputation. They would rape women. We called them the Indian *People Killing Force*.

The "IPKF time" that Meena refers to is the period between July 1987 and April 1989, when Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka was under the control of the Indian Peace-Keeping Forces (IPKF). The IPKF were sent in by then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi under the *Indo-Sri Lankan Accord* ostensibly to disarm the LTTE and other militants, maintain law and order, and to facilitate elections for the newly-formed North-Eastern Provincial Council. Given the atrocities being carried out by both the Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE in the

East, the Eastern Tamils were initially welcoming of the IPKF. However, it itself proved to be abusive and unpopular and tragically added to the party of players causing suffering and loss for civilians in the North and East. In concurrence with Meena's comment about the rape it has been documented that the rape of local women by IPKF soldiers was widespread, alongside civilian deaths and disappearances on a large scale (see UTHR 1989, 1990; HRW 1995; Alison 2003).

In early October 1987, after the incident involving the suicide of captured LTTE cadres about to be transferred to Colombo (see page 82), the LTTE took up arms against the IPKF, largely fighting in Jaffna and the jungles of Batticaloa (Gunaratna 1994). During this time LTTE attacks against the Sinhalese also increased. While the IPKF and the LTTE fought in the North and East the Sri Lankan government, faced a second JVP-led insurgency that had erupted in response to among others the Indian intervention. This insurgency and its brutal suppression caused the deaths of an estimated 60,000 people between 1987 and 1990, the vast majority gruesomely killed by forces linked to the state (Gunaratna 2001; Chandraprema 1991). As the presence of the Indian troops became an increasing political liability for the Sri Lankan government, in a bizarre turn of events the latter began negotiating with the LTTE (Hoole *et al* 1990, AI 1990c). By June 1989, the LTTE had declared a cease-fire with government security forces and by July, both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government had demanded the withdrawal of Indian troops (UTHR 1989b). In September, the Indian government agreed to withdraw its troops, and by the end of 1989 the IPKF had withdrawn from all but two districts, Trincomalee and Jaffna. The fighting represented a major loss of face for New Delhi. India had promised Sri Lanka that the LTTE would be completely disarmed, but it was apparent that the militants had surrendered only a fraction of their arsenal (ibid). As they withdrew, the LTTE began to take over primary responsibility for policing the North-East. In March 1990, the last Indian troops finally left Sri Lanka. Three months later, in June 1990, the LTTE broke its cease-fire with the Sri Lankan government, expressing frustration at the slowness of the government to accede to its political demands (Kearney 1987).

One day an IPKF soldier came to my home and were waiting at the gate. I went outside and was hiding from him because I was so scared. But he came looking for me but I was hiding behind a wall of the house. He came around the outside and I crept around behind him. We went around in a circle seven times but he did not catch me! What I did not know was that on a small studies table in the house he had written me a letter in English. I did not know but my husband saw it. He took the letter to the *Mudalali*

(merchant) who said that it was saying that I was beautiful and that he would come for me next time. I was five months pregnant at that time and so scared.

At that time I used to help a lot of people. For example, if the army came to their homes then they would come to my house. People had many bad experiences. I don't think the men planned rape but they came to the house and then did it. One young girl was raped twice. It was in an isolated place in the jungle. Luckily her husband understood the situation and did not blame her.

If we heard the food lorry coming for the army then we won't stay in the village. We would leave for about one day. If the men are not at home then at least five or six families can sleep together. The LTTE was a problem because the army was scared of the LTTE – so then the army had more men guarding and patrolling. In the village all the women were very frightened. If the LTTE threw a grenade then IPKF came after you. They would ask for “*thannir*” (water) and then follow you into the house. So many problems: if it is the Sri Lankan Army then the women send their husbands away, if it is the IPKF then even the women cannot stay. This is how we were trapped. The boys in the village – the ones who were without a moustache – they would take them too and keep them separately and rape them too. They used Manresa – it was a Catholic seminary that was captured by the army and used as a prison. First in 1988. That was the first place that women were raped. Then later at Thanamunai which was six kilometers from Batticaloa. It would be reasons like – the IPKF vehicle got caught in a landmine then they would get angry and rape many women. They never distinguished between the women; married or not, young or old.

The IPKF opened a dispensary so people used to go for medicine. It was a way of forming relationships with people. At one point I got a headache and had to get medicine from them. During this IPKF time the women started joining the LTTE. There was my stepfather's eldest daughter. My stepfather used to say she looked like a widow woman even though she was only twenty years old. He said that because of this he could not give a dowry so then he said he would propose her to a disabled man. She told

me and said she was afraid. So then she joined the LTTE. She stayed with them ten years. Now she is back with us and after two years of leaving she got married but after six months he left her. My stepfather's two sons also joined the LTTE because of how their father was. After two years the family wrote to the LTTE and they came back and got married.

Meena's situation demonstrates the vulnerability of women at that time; living as a household of three women and their children, with Meena's husband and stepfather rarely present, the women had to cope with poverty, violence, and the specific threat from the IPKF. Although women had been part of the LTTE since 1983, and despite claims that the role of female Tigers offered 'liberation' for Tamil women, the experience of Meena's stepfather's eldest daughter, like many of the other stories I heard, points towards a lack of other options as one reason for women joining the movement.<sup>58</sup> Many sought to escape difficult situations at home, including poverty, abuse, and unhappy relationships. This is also supported by evidence that the period around 1989 in which women suffered high levels of rape and violence correlates with the highest recruitment rates for the LTTE (Alison 2003; de Silva 1994; Trawick 2007). Lawrence (1997: 269) highlights the fact that Tamil people living under military occupation on the East coast consider rape the ultimate form of violation, and that victims of rape are considered 'irredeemable and utterly ruined'. This is explained by the strong ideological values placed on virginity (*Kannimai*), which is expected of a Tamil bride, and chastity (*Karpu*) understood to be a part of the symbolism of the marriage *tali*, tied around the neck of a woman upon marriage<sup>59</sup>. The stigma attached to rape has led to many families concealing attacks that have taken place and has also caused a number of women to escape the 'shame' by committing suicide, or joining the LTTE for example (ibid).<sup>60</sup> Although many women's groups and feminist campaigns have rejected the Tamil term for rape, *karpalippu* meaning 'destruction of chastity' and have sought to re-shape local concepts of rape, the shame, and silencing has continued (Maunaguru 1995: 166).

### **Early 1990s: Displacement and disappearances**

My last son was born on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1989 and in the 1990s big problems started in Sri Lanka. The government forces were trying to clear areas and so some families were camped at the Eastern University campus, others

---

<sup>58</sup> See Adele Balasingham (1993).

<sup>59</sup> See Reynolds (1980: 46).

<sup>60</sup> This was made clear to me by one woman who I met in an IDP camp outside Batticaloa in 2007. Drawing my attention to the rumours that women in Vaharai were being raped as the SLA took control she firmly told me "Only I am saving the Kerosene oil to burn myself if that should happen".

[went] to Vinayagapuram (a paddy area) and so I went to that area. My sister and her family came with us so we were all together. One sister did not come with us, she went with another group.

There was a gradual build up. My elder sister's husband went for work. The *mudalali* [merchant] was Muslim and OK with him. But there was another man who was upset with the mudalali so he told the army that he was keeping LTTE. So they cut him (killed him). He was my mother's brother's son. So then they all moved to our area. During that time in our area we were not used to the plane bombings. One plane did a round and then we saw these things falling from the plane. The children said they were birds. But then we saw the fire and realized that we could be killed by the things from this plane. And then there would be the helicopters in the sky. They would see people on the street and come low behind them and shoot. We used to hide under a tree. It was a very muddy area and there was lots of water. People could not see the tree from the sky. However, it wasn't a good area as there was lots of crocodiles and snakes etc. We did not know what to do though. Until the helicopter left the area we would all be hiding in the tree.

One day though a person was trying to move from there and he was seen by the helicopter. They shot him and he got very injured. In the 1990s so much happened. The EROS office was destroyed by the army. We were in the jungle area. The Muslim community would do business with us as they were working in their area. We had to work with food exchange, as we had no money. We gave paddy. But then one day the LTTE killed one hundred people in Eravur and after that the Muslims stopped coming to that area. At that time some Tamil people did not know about the incident in Eravur so they still went to their side and then they got killed.

In June 1990 what is often referred to as the 'Eelam War II' broke out, following the withdrawal of the IPKF three months earlier. The Eastern Province became an area synonymous with disappearances and death (see Lawrence 1999, Punyasena 2003). The large-scale enforced disappearances were not a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. The brutal counter-insurgency campaign used to suppress the armed insurgency of the JVP in the South in 1987-90 disappeared and carried out extrajudicial executions of thousands of

people (AI 1990). Presidential commissions established during the 1990s as a result of public pressure and international criticism found that over 20,000 people disappeared over the course of the second JVP insurrection and the 1990 war, however human rights groups argue that this figure is two or three times higher.<sup>61</sup> Most of the victims of Eelam War II were young Tamil men suspected of belonging to or associating with the LTTE.

Meena also highlights the fragile communal relations in the East which had the capacity to implode at any time if communities were threatened, felt betrayed or sought retaliation and revenge as a result of grievances. As described earlier, the simmering tensions in some areas between Tamils and Muslims were exacerbated and played upon by those in power. The LTTE, for example, blamed the Muslims for being successively, agents of the Sri Lankan state, India and the IPKF. However, as Taraki, who was one of Sri Lanka's most famous journalists, points out, in the East, the LTTE survived the IPKF offensive chiefly because Muslims kept the supply lines open through Muslim areas to feed Tigers who were in the jungle ([1990] 1991: 71).<sup>62</sup> This is also supported by Meena's comments about the Muslims doing trade with displaced Tamil people through food exchange at that time.

By arming Pakistani-trained Muslim's (home guards) operating under the name *jihad* the STF attributed much of their killings and destruction of homes to the Jihad using them as a scape - goat and thus increasing communal tensions. This in turn enabled Tamil militants to carry out ruthless attacks on Muslims in 'defense' of the Tamils. Communal violence broke out in 1990 when the LTTE murdered over 100 surrendered Muslim policemen, triggering Muslims to carry out anti-Tamil violence in response. As in 1985, the anti-Tamil violence was orchestrated by the state who used the situation to fuel a sense of panic and fear (Hoole *et al* 1990). Muslim anxieties were reflected in the rise of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC) founded by the Muslim political activist M.H.M. Ashraff. Before that, Muslims had largely voted for either the UNP or the SLFP. Over the course of the 1990s, the SLMC became dominant among the Muslim electorate, although its electoral heartland was always confined to the Eastern Province (*ibid*).<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup>In 2006 and 2007, the United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances recorded more new "disappearance" cases from Sri Lanka than from any other country in the world. See also Punyasena (2003) and Lawrence (1997).

<sup>62</sup> Taraki (Sivaram) was killed in April 2005 when he was kidnapped inside a government-controlled area in Colombo. His body was found the next day, badly beaten and shot in the head. In Chapter Four I discuss the work of Mark Whitaker, for whom Sivaram's life provided the topic of his latest book (see Chapter Four: 134).

<sup>63</sup> After Ashraff died in a helicopter crash just before the elections of October 2000, the SLMC disintegrated. Rauff Hakeem took over the leadership of the party, but very soon Ashraff's widow, Ferial split off and formed her own party, the National Unity Alliance (NUA). In 2003, further splits followed, and by 2007 the bigger Muslim towns on the East coast were like small town republics,

Between July and August 1990, the LTTE carried out a series of massacres in Muslim areas ‘with deliberate calculation’ to destabilize the Batticaloa district and working relationships between Tamils and Muslims (Hoole 1995). Carrying out research ten years after the 1990 massacre in Eravur, Fuglerud (2004: 71) notes that Muslim inhabitants claimed that their Tamil neighbours, at the time of the massacre, had prior knowledge of the plans to kill and yet did nothing to stop it happening. This prior knowledge, they argued, was made obvious in the way that a number of Tamils had left town days before the massacre took place. However, Muslims claim that it was only after the event that they realized what this exodus of Tamils meant. Fuglerud does not state whether this was actually the case or whether it is an ex-post facto construction by Muslims, however it illustrates the level of suspicion and tension that existed between groups at that time. While the LTTE massacred Muslims in the East, in the North Muslims were forcibly evicted from the five districts of the Northern Province by the LTTE in 1990. This has been described as an act of ethnic cleansing of the North and has been attributed to the frustration of the LTTE with the lack of support from the Muslim community.<sup>64</sup> Despite agreement by the LTTE after the 2002 ceasefire to allow Muslims to return home, many remain in IDP camps in Puttalam and areas in the East. The journalist Taraki wrote in the early 1990s that the LTTE's post-1990 anti-Muslim policy was a result of the Tiger leadership deciding to go along with the advice of its Eastern cadres that the LTTE would have to respond to the demands of Tamils in the East to defend them from Muslim attacks.

### **The Eastern university tragedy**

There were nearly 45,000 people in the Eastern University. They had nothing. Those families would try to get to their area to take food but then the Muslims would kill them. So they had started to take whatever they could, even furniture etc. The army found out so took it to their side. Then in 1990 on September 5<sup>th</sup> the SLA did a huge round up in the University. They took 156 men and they all went missing. This included government officers, bankers, the GS [*Grama Sevaka*], school children.<sup>65</sup> All of them gone, unaccounted for...this is what they managed to do and nobody could stop them.

---

each with its own dominant political party.

<sup>64</sup> Thiranagama (2005) recounts the experiences of Northern Muslims during the 1990 Eviction and details the stories of those living in camps for the displaced in Puttalam.

<sup>65</sup> The Grama Sevaka (or, as the position is now called, Grama Niladhari) is the ‘village leader’. The GS is the lowest level local government official.

The people in Viyaganapuram area were safe. In our area there was sometimes bombings and shootings but we managed. In cleared areas they had the problems. One day we heard the army moving close and we all got scared and started to run. My husband took three children, my sister's husband had one, I had one, and my sister had one ...we were all running. Then the helicopter started firing. I could see them, my hair was flying, and I could feel it behind me. I crouched down at the side and was trying to hide the children under me, trying to keep them covered. Then my son started shouting – three children were with my husband and they were still running. The helicopter was going from side to side and bullets were spraying everywhere – into the palmyrah trees that were around us. I am still terrified of the noise of the helicopter. My daughter is also scared. I used to get really bad headaches.

According to the UTHR (1990a) report on the incident at the Eastern University refugee camp, 158 detainees were taken to the Valaichenai Army camp and from there they were 'disappeared'. Speaking to local people about this incident, many told me how everyone in the camp had been ordered to line up and prepare for a routine check of ID cards. However, once they were outside the men and women were separated and then the men forced to line up. At the front of the line a row of men with hoods over their faces were made to 'identify' whether the men were militants or not. They would nod or shake their heads and those identified were put in the group that was taken to the camp. The Eastern University disappearances are one of many incidents in which large numbers of Tamil men, women, and children were taken away and disappeared.<sup>66</sup>

### **1991-1992: Survival against the odds**

We spent one year in the jungle. In 1991, we all started to come back to the village slowly. Sometimes people left again because they were scared and then they waited and then they came back. We were always going and coming, going and coming. At that time many women lost husbands through the shooting. When people think about war, they only think of that kind of widow, yet many husbands also died from snakebites and illness too.

---

<sup>66</sup> Lawrence (1997) has documented the case of 160 prisoners killed and burnt on 9th September 1990 by personnel from the Saturukonda army camp. The list of victims totalled 184 and of this number, there were 47 children below the age of 10 and several women.



I was working as a midwife at the time. I delivered six babies (one girl and five boys). I had no training but I just learnt. One child was born at 2 a.m., and then the next day we waited for the placenta but it did not come out for hours. The mother was just 16 and that was the first child for her. At that time there was lots of incidents inside houses with the army – you would come and find blood and bras. If you had paddy sacks then the army would take it for their sentry points. From X [cleared area] I moved to another place. I was frightened to stay in the house and so stayed in my mother's house. My stepfather had married a second time. My elder sister had gone back to Kayankerny. Amma was in X with children and she put a small shop. I went to Y [uncleared area] and I got some land and built a house. It was 1991. In November, with my family we went to that house. Through the back of the house there was a TELO camp with the army. They were pointing people out. They would kill them and leave a note.

The point that Meena raises about the other everyday dangers that civilians faced such as snakes and illnesses is particularly important. It not only highlights the fact that everyday life would have been fraught with multiple risks and vulnerabilities, but also that much of what is written about that time in terms of loss of life has tended to ignore the multiple factors at play. However, a recent report (2009) on the conditions that displaced civilians would face in Northern Sri Lanka if sent back home has highlighted the relative perceived risk of snakes v. warfare. Noting that snakes are a particular risk on cultivated land, the report suggests that the Sri Lankan government's claims that landmines pose the biggest threat to resettlement of IDPs in Northern Sri Lanka are no more than an excuse to avoid releasing them from the internment camps. The report notes,

As a consequence of a recent phase of conflict however, the risk of ERW [Explosive Remnants of War] has increased appreciably – but mortality figures are unlikely to approach the combined numbers of people that succumb to snake bites when returning to cultivate land and those that choose to take their own lives due to misery and trauma' (IDMC 2009).

While this report should not be used to suggest the absence of landmines and other forms of violence linked to the conflict, it does at least signpost the multiplicity of everyday vulnerabilities that civilians must endure. Moreover, Meena's description of working as a midwife without training reflects the severe shortages of medical support and equipment in

the East in the 1990s as well as restricted access to hospitals. HRW (1995) documents the restrictions placed by the Sri Lankan government on the import of essential supplies into LTTE-controlled areas, which put heavy burdens on medical staff and the civilian populations. Food was also reported to be in dangerously short supply in the uncleared areas of North and East - this problem was compounded by government restrictions on the amount of food people were allowed to transport into these areas (reported to be only what is sufficient for one person for three days in the case of Northern Batticaloa district) (HRW 1995).

### **Tragedy**

July 1992. My husband was killed. He went for work and was killed. During 1992 there was so much control and you could not take much into uncleared areas, no batteries etc. Army limited everything so that you could not give them to the LTTE. So my husband went and said that for ten days he would not come back. He went with a team for paddy work. I had a dream that night and a tense feeling in my body. I predicted a negative effect to my family. Before he died, my husband visited all of his sisters and even said to one of them that maybe there would be some problem for our land – but that he knew I wouldn't allow that.

He left in the morning around 7 a.m. I was teaching. I came home and lit the lamp. I was trying to make a cup of tea for my son using palmyrah leaves. Then I heard shooting. I thought someone was running towards our house so I shouted to the children to get a knife. But no one came. That night no one slept. The next day I felt that someone was telling me to tie the door shut. Without knowing why I felt I had to take some kind of responsibility. The next day I heard people talking and heard that someone had been shot and it was very near us near the bridge.

The second morning people were talking about it again. I advised people not to go and find out and I went back to school. Then the GS [*Grama Seveka*] arrived at the school. I thought he was arriving for work. But he asked me to come and then took me to the camp. He said that there was one body there. I asked why they would kill my husband, as he has no connection. We went to the body. I identified him only from a photograph he had in his pocket. His face was so badly damaged that I could not tell.

Even my sister's husband could not tell who it was. My friend had been to India and bought back a temple thread. I had tied that to my husband's wrist and so when we went into the camp and I saw the body I could see that the thread was there. But his body was so damaged – everything was coming out of his head – he had only one eye looking at me. But the thread was there.

Just before this incident there had been a landmine set for the Valaichchenai train. When the train had stopped and people had got out then they had been shot dead. When I was in the camp after finding my husband's body a lorry arrived with the Muslim bodies from the train. I tried to jump into the lorry, as I wanted to die. But the lady behind me held onto me tightly.

The day before my husband had left, someone had seen the army talking to my husband. This person had wanted to tell me but he had met someone on the road and got chatting. It had then got late so he had decided to tell me the next day. If I had known that night then I could have gone to the camp and saved him.

While I was still in the camp a person came along with a palmyrah cap. I jumped on him and grabbed his shirt saying that he killed my husband. He was a TELO man. Then they brought a van and took the body with the army escort to the hospital. The police asked me questions and asked me to sign for the body. I refused. What world is this? They killed my husband and I have to sign to get him back dead. But a Muslim man persuaded me. I asked for the body. We went to the mortuary. There were sixteen army bodies there too. They did not clean the body and I could not see which one he was because of the sheets.

Then we took the body home. We were stopped at the Eravur border and the army were around us. A group of Muslims were looking for Tamils to kill because of the train incident. They stopped us and asked us to open the van and show the body. If the army had not been there then me, my brother's wife, and others who were with us, all would be finished. We took the body home and had a ceremony. We could not keep the body there for long as it was badly injured so we buried it. The villagers helped.

We had just had to put a new cemetery in the village and he was the seventh person to go. I had to go there on the thirtieth day. My sister was with me. We were really worried that the army were around the area because they had been saying that my husband was an LTTE supporter. It wasn't true but they had said that so that people wouldn't come to my house.

### Small steps

At that time I was still working with Sarvodaya as a volunteer. With no pay we had no food. One day my son who was 3 years vomited something a white colour because he had had no food. I talked to the next-door people and told them my problem. The lady shouted, "Why did not you tell me?" She gave me rice and sugar for the children. I was frightened by that experience and felt that I needed to earn some money. It was not long after the funeral and I had four children in the house. They were always crying and were very frightened. So was I. I bought some paddy seeds and made rice by boiling and breaking it. I wanted to sell that. But I did not know the exact boiling time so that got spoilt so I had to give it to the children instead. At that time you got a food stamp and if you gave one *sindu* (tin) then you would get coconut and chili. So I pawned my food stamp and got the money. I bought the ingredients to make *vadai* and for the first two days that went well. But after that it did not. Then I talked to the shop man about making *kadalai*.<sup>67</sup> I started making this and made Rs90. This was 1992. That time the situation had slightly reduced. There was less round ups.

My children missed their father. My daughter was always crying and seemed to miss him. My son was always asking questions. His body had been in the sun at the camp for so long that his skin was coming off. My child thought someone had pulled it off. People had also said that he had been chopped in the head. One day when I went out my second son made a doll and hung it from the tree. He would play killing with his friends. My elder son would wake up at night and run thinking his father was there. One day we were all sitting outside and we all fell asleep. Early the next morning we woke up with a dog barking. We woke up and saw the

---

<sup>67</sup> *Kadalai* is a snack item composed of chickpeas that have been boiled and sometimes fried served with with chilli and coconut.

army around us staring. The army asked us where's the husband. When I said he was dead they said we did not need to come for the round up. They took others and even beat the women.



Figure 10: Houses in an 'uncleared' area, Batticaloa district (2005)

### 3.3 Part Three: Making Ends Meet

#### 1992 – 1994: Widows and NGOs

November 1992. We made a widows society. In that group some of the women used to meet with the AGA Section.<sup>68</sup> Within that section was the RDO (Rural Development Officer) whom we used to ask for help. But that man used to shout at the widows. One woman cried because he shouted so much. So I went and met him and shouted back at him. Then after that he kept quiet...and then said that he would help me. He directed me to ERO [Eastern Rehabilitation Organization] and I came to Batticaloa to meet them. There I met a person in ERO. He thought that I had just brought the other woman with me and did not realize that I was also a widow. But then when he found out that I too was a widow he told me that there was a group coming from Colombo to meet with widows and

---

<sup>68</sup> AGA refers to the additional government administrator.

run a workshop at Manresa. I really wanted to do this so I went home and pawned my food stamps (at that time with the food stamps you got Rs240 every month for six months.<sup>69</sup> Then if you pawn it people will give you Rs 120 and you can buy the food yourself). So I pawned four stamps and got Rs360 to buy all of the food for my children and my sister's children (I had to buy for all of them). And I sent my children to my sister's place. Training was good. I was selected as the second best person in the training and so then selected as a field officer. I got Rs500 per month for six months. I had to work in my village and then come to Batticaloa once a month. My work was mostly getting documents such as ID cards, birth certificates [of the deceased] with the widows. During the training someone from the Kachcheri had come down and advised us on how to get the information.<sup>70</sup> This was a very difficult thing for the widows to get.

Meena describes the type of work that was being done to provide some support to widows in Eastern Sri Lanka during the 1990s. While widows and women-headed households are not an uncommon phenomenon in Sri Lanka (see Weerasinghe 1987; Perera 1991), they have increased in large proportions because of the decimation of the male population in the North and East. The social stigma that surrounds widows in all three communities, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim, has not made these women's tasks any easier (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1998: 10; Samarasinghe & Galappatti, 1998: 6). Although a number of women's organizations and NGOs have specifically supported widows in the North and East, the majority of widowed heads of households continue to face a constant battle for economic stability, privacy, physical safety. Ruwanpura (2006: 212), however, identifies the significance of networks amongst female kin in Eastern Sri Lanka which have 'shifted from the economic to the non-economic, with a movement from support from men to support from women'. In particular the experiences of dislocation and displacement faced by some female-heads has shown how women have given support by meeting each other's practical gender need. Furthermore, Ruwanpura notes 'in rare instances some women show a feminist consciousness that can be used to meet strategic gender needs' (ibid).<sup>71</sup> Based on what I heard and observed while visiting widows and mothers with the *Valkai* group I would suggest that this was more than 'rare' in the border villages and that a number of informal networks of various shapes and forms existed between women and across communities.

---

<sup>69</sup> In 1992 Rs240 would have been approximately £3.07 (£1 equal to Rs78.66). [http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2007/11/21660\\_space.html](http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2007/11/21660_space.html).

<sup>70</sup> The Kachcheri is the district administrative headquarters.

<sup>71</sup> See also De Alwis (2002); Ruwanpura & Humphries (2004).

While I was in training my three daughters became big girls but I did not know.<sup>72</sup> When I had finished the workshop I was travelling home and had to stop at the checkpoint. I was in the queue and the woman behind me was pulling at my sari and crying. I got scared about what might have happened. But after checking, she told me that my daughter had got big.<sup>73</sup> The Rs500 I was earning was not enough for me so I made *kadalai* in the night and from that made another Rs500. In that way I could manage my family.

I worked in Kalmunai and Ampara [on the East coast] but that meant that I had to leave my family. I stayed with a widow who I knew because although the organization gave me my travelling fees, they did not give me any accommodation. I put my daughters in a hostel. And then the three boys – they were sometimes with others and sometimes alone. They would cook and eat on their own. One day when I had come home, I was looking for my coconut spoon to do some cooking. I started shouting that people had taken it but then my son said that they had used it for firewood! Then I was looking for a teacup and they had broken it and buried it. I came home every 2-3 days. I feel that in that period my son, who was twelve years old, changed a lot. There was a lot of responsibility on him like cooking after school etc. Within our area there were a lot of children without a father or whose mother was abroad. They would all get together at my house and eat. They wasted a lot of things.

During that period I had lots of opportunity for training. So I was mostly out of the home with training. But then my younger brother went missing (he was the tenth child). Before him another brother had been taken by the army and he was also in the movement. The army had brought him in front of my mother and beaten my mother. They kept him in prison for two years and eventually a friend got him out, I had another brother in the movement too. He had been working to mend a bridge and the army had come and beaten them, so then he ran to the movement. He did not come

---

<sup>72</sup> Meena refers to her sister's daughters as her own here.

<sup>73</sup> This refers to the time when girls begin menstruation and is seen as an auspicious and special time marked by puberty rituals and celebrations to mark the 'coming of age' (see McGilvray 1998 and of Tamil women and puberty rites in Southern India see Good 1991; Kapadia 1995).

back to Batticaloa but went to Jaffna. So I had two sisters and two brothers in the movement. One sister had joined after her husband had died as she felt she had no protection for the family. Another sister had been abused by my stepfather so because of that she joined. I felt at one time that with so many family members in the movement, maybe this could be a reason for husband's death.

One time I had to go to Ampara for a programme. I had sent all of my family together to one place and I got a bus to Batticaloa. But two days earlier there had been an incident at a checkpoint – the army had killed everyone by cutting them with a knife. I did not know this and so I was travelling in the bus and then the bus had stopped at this point. The driver then told me what had happened. The army made everyone get down. I stayed on with one lady with a child and an old woman. One STF guy got on the bus and was staring at me. He asked me why I could not get down. I told him that I could not walk. He asked for my ID card. I had three ID cards at that time. The STF then asked the other lady why she hadn't got down. He then turned to me and asked me if I was working. I had an SLRC [Sri Lanka Red Cross] ID card. That made the man nervous. I told him that I was a committee member because I knew that the bodies from their killing would have been collected by the SLRC. Then everyone was allowed back on the bus. The driver said - "Because of this lady you have all been saved".

### **Gendered vulnerabilities**

I used to be involved in a programme for released prisoners. I formed a group and went to Colombo. But then they said that there was no money for our group because it had been given to the South. So we were all upset as we had lots of expectations. Then another day when I went for the meeting they said that there were clothes I could take for Batticaloa people. But they did not open the door and show me what clothes were there. Yet when people from the South came they opened the door so that they would get first choice. Another time Z [an NGO] had got sponsorship for twelve children. In a meeting they decided on six children from the south, four Tamil children and two Muslim children. I got up in the meeting and asked why they had such discrimination and why could it not



be four from each? But from that time onwards people made it tough for me and were always making jokes and trying to get me out.

There was a director there who seemed to care about people who travelled from the East. But the others questioned him. But then this man resigned and we all got upset and decided not to work for Z anymore. We were angry with the director because before he left he had organized training in Batticaloa but never did it. After he left it was decided I should work with an NGO coordinator in Batticaloa. I had to start a vocational training programme. I suggested starting it right away and he said yes. But then I got a letter from Colombo saying “Who told you to start?” I had a letter proving that I should start immediately so I sent that and they gave me the money. But all of these issues forced me to leave the NGO.

One day a Colombo team came to Batticaloa for an evaluation of the work. I had to stay in Kalmunai so I asked the Kalmunai team whether they can take care of me. They said No. So then I had to go to Kalmunai and stay in the office. I prepared everything and then kept my files by my bed as I planned to get up early in the morning and finish my work. However, there was one accountant from another organization in the same building and at 10 pm he opened the door and asked what I was doing. I said sleeping and he went away. Around 1am I woke to feel someone touching me I shouted “*Sir Niingalaa?*” (Is it you?). He said don’t worry I am just coming to sleep with you. I grabbed the key and ran to the watcher. The watcher asked me what had happened and I told him that there was a ghost but actually the watcher knew because this man had abused many women.

That man was angry with me when I warned other people as he said I was spreading rumours. He was so angry that he even tried to push other men onto me. You know it is a point because now people are writing about the abuse of NGO people after the Tsunami but people know that from the 1990s that women were getting abused in NGOs. After this I resigned from Z and on June the 1<sup>st</sup> 1996 I joined another local organization working with children affected by trauma from the violence. For me this was like heaven from hell. There was a big difference with this kind of

work with children. But still there were administrative issues which made me disappointed and sad as I had expected more difference.

Noting the extent of sexual abuse that women suffered in the 1990s in the East, Meena refers to the post-Tsunami controversy around women working for local and international NGOs in the Eastern Province in 2006. This stemmed from a scandal in which it was alleged that local women working for national and international agencies had been forced into appearing in pornographic 'blue' films (Lankanewspapers.com 2006), and the distribution of informal leaflets in April 2006 calling for women to cease working in NGOs to protect their culture and purity (Women and Media Committee [WMC] 2006).<sup>74</sup> However, as Meena's narrative reveals, women have frequently and systematically been targeted for sexual violence yet few incidents have received the same attention and concern as the controversies after these 2006 controversies. This is most likely due to the fact that the kind of abuse Meena describes is by men within her own culture and community and therefore is tied into many layers of secrecy, fear and denial. Abuse by 'outsiders' (foreigners) however is less problematic and the apparent perpetrators can easily be condemned. The significance of what Meena says is that she illuminates the intersections at which different forms of vulnerability and violence play into one another and trap women in Eastern Sri Lanka within a web of complex and destructive forces. For example, the intended sexual violence by the NGO accountant who tries to attack Meena in the night is made possible by the context of relative isolation and vulnerability of women created through the wider context of political violence. The complexities of this web of violence however means that attacks are unlikely to be recognized and accounted for in comparison to a more obvious form of violence such as the rape of Tamil women by Sinhalese soldiers or international workers.

In relation to the discrimination by NGOs, Orjuela (2005: 213-223), states that the divides in Sri Lankan society between the North (and the East) and South were reflected in civil society organizations and particularly peace movements. Most large peace organizations had their base in Colombo and many were perceived to be Sinhala-dominated. Many Sinhala peace activists did not speak Tamil and a lack of interaction across boundaries and geographical distances also led to a lack of understanding of Tamil perspectives (ibid). The elite nature of the best established and most prominent civic organizations also serves to explain the lack of emphasis placed on socioeconomic rights and class inequality in preference for the 'middle

---

<sup>74</sup> The leaflets followed a speech by a TNA politician in April 2006 which claimed that there was a high rate of abortions in the Eastern Province and cited the employment of young women in NGOs after the Tsunami as being responsible for extra-marital sexual relationships, pornography and the spread of disease. Although the source of the leaflet was unconfirmed it was generally assumed to be groups linked to Muslim extremists and the TMVP (Ibid).

class orientated' Human Rights agenda (Orjuela 2005: 222; Keenan 2003).<sup>75</sup> Goodhand & Hulme (1999: 27) have shown that locals in Eastern Sri Lanka were critical of NGOs, which they saw as unreliable, serving their own agendas and favouring the wealthy over the poorest such as widows, the elderly, and the landless. This links with the fact that 1994 was also the dawn for increased 'peace aid' (Orjuela 2004) bringing a rise in the number of INGOs and NGOs focused on peace building and other projects such as language reform, devolution of power and government campaigns for 'national integration' (ibid). In 1994, peace talks were held between the People's Alliance (PA) coalition government and the LTTE brought a whole new perspective and fresh hopes for peace. Elected on an unprecedented platform of reconciliation, human rights, and anti-corruption, the government pursued a cessation of hostilities and negotiations with the LTTE, and the whole island was caught up in euphoria of impending peace. The peace euphoria however, was short-lived and despite many auspicious circumstances, three months later the ceasefire and negotiations collapsed as the LTTE resumed the battle. As a result the government was damaged and disorientated and saw little choice but to retaliate militarily and a controversial 'war for peace' strategy emerged (Nissan 1998; Rupasinghe 1998, 2006). Highlighting the relationship between conflict, aid and human rights, Orjuela notes that although donor threats to withdraw aid if the government failed to improve its human rights record in the 1990s were successful (in reducing human rights violations), no such pressure was used against the government when it escalated the war after the breakdown of talks in 1995. Furthermore, such a focus on peace meant that many of the organizations working in the North and East developed specific projects to focus on 'peace education' and 'conflict resolution' rather than incorporate peace as an overall dimension to their work thus undermining their ability to generate incentives for peace on a broader scale.<sup>76</sup>

### **Child soldiers**

In October 1996 my son who was fifteen years old joined with a school friend and they joined the LTTE. He joined because my brother had been violent with him and he was angry and revengeful and wanting to get his own back on his uncle. I asked the LTTE to release them but they wouldn't. But in 2000 he came home – at that time the LTTE used to send boys home, which they said was for the family but it was really for them to gather intelligence. My son did not want to go back and so he stayed with me. I had to keep him at home. He had no ID documents. But on

---

<sup>75</sup> See Orjuela (2005) for a discussion of the internal divides in peace movements.

<sup>76</sup> See Orjuela 2004.

January 12<sup>th</sup> they came for him. About ten of them came and took him away in the night. I went behind them but they wouldn't give him back.

Then the LTTE sent me a letter to meet them at Illuppudichenai so I went. He (my son) was in punishment and they said that after three years of punishment they would release him. So January the 12<sup>th</sup> was the last time that I saw my eldest son. Those who were with him or in the LTTE told me that they had sent him to the Vanni in the North.

International law prohibits the recruitment of children under the age of 18 by non-state armed groups, and all participation of children in active hostilities (HRW 2004). However, children have featured prominently in the makeup of the LTTE throughout the conflict. It was estimated in 2004 that up to 60 per cent of LTTE cadres were below eighteen, with 40 percent of them girls (HRW 2004). The issue of child conscripts is one that attracts much attention globally and the LTTE's strategy of recruiting children into their ranks has been widely reported. However, campaigns about child soldiers tend to concentrate on children under fifteen taken into an armed group. Yet, as UTHR (2002: 8) notes, child conscription 'is just a reflection of the whole society being conscripted. The question of choice, whether child or adult does not arise'. Although Meena states that her son *joined* the LTTE, she also notes that he was fleeing violence at home and therefore joined as an escape route and for revenge. Revenge, along with poverty, deprivation (particularly in the border areas), abuses and suffering under the SLA, alongside a sophisticated LTTE propaganda machine, are factors that many parents have identified behind child recruitment (HRW 2004, interviews with families in the East). In August 2002, the LTTE commenced compulsory recruitment on a wide-scale in the Batticaloa district under the slogan of 'one child per family'. This followed huge losses for families in recent years and increased resistance from parents in the North to handing over their children. Although parents complained to the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) who were in Sri Lanka to ensure that the terms of the 2002 ceasefire were adhered to, they found it effectively redundant in its role since they were there to 'monitor' rather than 'take action'.<sup>77</sup> Mothers in Batticaloa were very clear about the ineffective role of the SLMM, UNICEF and other international agencies in protecting families from recruitment and providing support to those whose children were taken (HRW 2004). Many mothers described how they developed their own strategies to try and get their children back, which involved daily visits to the camps and paying sums of money to the LTTE. However, like Meena, few had much success.

---

<sup>77</sup> Interview with SLMM in the East 2005.

Once recruited, most children were allowed no contact with their families. The LTTE would subject them to rigorous, and sometimes brutal, training and public punishment of those who tried to run away was used to discourage other children from trying. One of the biggest problems for parents in the East whose children were taken was that many were moved to the North for training and fighting and therefore parents had no way of contacting them or knowing their fate. This was particularly the case in 1997-1999, when the army fought a large-scale offensive to recapture the Vanni. It is reported that the LTTE only managed to survive through the influx of hundreds of cadres from the East, which ironically was organized by the LTTE Eastern commander at that time, Colonel Karuna. Karuna, as I have noted, split from the LTTE in 2004, seeking favour with Eastern Tamils by initially declaring that all children should be released from the LTTE, and allowed to be at home with their parents.<sup>78</sup>

#### **From 2004: Factional politics, fractured lives**

Sridevi, my eldest daughter who was born in 1979, was upset about her brother leaving. She had not completed her O' levels and was at home. She was quite close to him. She joined Manresa (a Catholic seminary and training centre) for one and a half years, on a sewing and hairdressing course, after which I took her home in 2001. On the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2001 she got registered (married). In 2001 she started working with World Vision as a social mobiliser. In 2002 she gave birth to a daughter and then on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2004, the LTTE took her husband away. This was just after the LTTE split. The LTTE said that her husband was supporting Karuna. That was not true. Karuna and the LTTE were the same – they both came from the same thing. My daughter went to the LTTE several times but they just said that he was a traitor. For two years my daughter was unable to see him. She went to the LTTE continuously and finally they told her in 2006 that he had been sent to the Vanni. They said that as long as Karuna was here they would not show him in Batticaloa.

As an LTTE commander, Karuna had an extremely negative reputation amongst Tamils and Muslims. It was well-known, for example, that he had been involved in organizing pogroms

---

<sup>78</sup> Margaret Trawick's (2007) book on childhood play in Batticaloa was written during the time of this offensive. Although I take issue with the premise of her book, in which she fails to acknowledge the evidence of forced recruitment and the brutality by the LTTE, her insights from inside an LTTE-controlled area at that time are valuable.

against Muslims and had thus acquired the nickname of 'the Butcher'.<sup>79</sup> However, by distancing himself from Prabhakaran and the LTTE's ethnic cleansing of Muslims from the North, Karuna sought to reestablish relationships and gain support (Hariharan 2004). From mid-2004, there was a major surge in political killings, not just in the North and East but also in Colombo where Karuna's group engaged in the kidnapping of wealthy Tamil businessmen. Karuna's faction gradually reasserted influence in both government and previously LTTE-controlled areas in the East, although the very existence of the Karuna group complicated the 2002 ceasefire agreement. After the breakaway, Karuna asked to be formally included under the ceasefire agreement, which would have obligated his forces to abide by the terms of the ceasefire but given him a seat at further peace talks. The LTTE rejected this and instead demanded that the Karuna group be disarmed under the ceasefire agreement as a 'Tamil paramilitary group' (International Crisis Group [ICG] 2006: 9). Karuna rejected this on the grounds that this provision did not apply to his forces, which had been part of the LTTE under the peace accord. Small-scale fighting between the LTTE and Karuna group persisted and hundreds of civilians such as Meena's son-in-law found themselves victim to escalating tit-for-tat arrests and killings.

#### **A disaster of a different kind.**

On 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004 there was the Tsunami. This did not directly affect my family but there is not a person who is not affected here in the East. So many people died and it was such a big trauma for so many. At my work with the children – many children lost their parents or brothers and sisters. It was so sad as many would be crying, crying and X (who runs the project) would be trying to comfort them but what can you say? If it is the war then others know this pain and we know why even if it is not right but with the Tsunami, it was so unexpected and no reasons why. And the Tsunami brought in so many people to do more NGO work. Too many people were here and they had all this money – but you can't bring people back with money. That is not the answer. It made people angry and it started these problems with local people and foreign people too.

The Tsunami brought more strain to a region already struggling with displacement and loss from the conflict. In her comments about the children at her work who were struggling to cope with the loss of their family members in the Tsunami, Meena highlights the differences between the kinds of violence and loss engendered by the conflict and Tsunami. Where people had developed strategies and tactics for dealing with the violence of the conflict, the

---

<sup>79</sup> Interviews with Muslim families 2006.

Tsunami created an unfamiliar situation for communities already dealing with concerns for their security, livelihood, health, education, and resettlement. I deal with this idea of different kinds of vulnerability in Chapter Five in relation to the experiences of both a widow, Rani, who lost her son in the conflict, and a group of fishermen struggling to get back to work after the Tsunami.

### **2006: Family burdens**

Then my daughter had a problem in her workplace and she gave the job up in June 2006. After leaving she met this new man who was a widower with three children. I was unaware that she was secretly married to this guy and I only got to find out through my niece. I was very upset by this. At this time we were celebrating the tenth anniversary at my workplace. My family that was together there was my sister's children, my daughter and her husband and one year old son. We all cooked together. We had everything together and were managing. But then my sister died in an accident with fire (July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005) so her two daughters came to me. Then Deepan my third child got married and was pregnant living with me too. It was an unimaginable burden on me.

Deepan's child was born on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2006. When her husband went to visit her in hospital...I went too to see the child...at that time the husband was coming out to get hot water and was delayed in coming back. I started looking for him. When he did not come back at 2.00pm I came out looking for him and was thinking what could have happened to him. Then I overheard the hospital security saying, "see – that boy who went to get hot water was taken away". The moment I heard this I pounced on the security guard and asked him what had happened. I went to the TMVP office and they told me that he would come out. He did come out and he was really frightened. It was apparently a case of mistaken identity – they had handcuffed him and tied him up – and then only started to find out who he was. He is now a little settled after that fright and has put a small shop next to the house. He also does many odd jobs, masonry, wiring, and carpentry. Many men try to get by like this – they are always so scared of being taken – and there are so many groups to take them – so they never know what they can do and what they can say.

The period of 2006 saw an escalation of conflict as the government relaunched military action against the LTTE in July 2006. This heightened the everyday struggle of civilians in the North and East, as Meena's narrative explains. Promising the restoration of democracy, devolution of powers to local and provincial politicians and development of the Province, a year-long campaign to 'clear' the East of the LTTE saw large-scale destruction and the displacement of almost 200,000 mostly Tamil civilians (HRW 2008). The Karuna's group the TMVP became valuable allies to the security forces during this time although there also seemed to be a deliberate attempt to keep Karuna's power limited, most probably due to the campaign by international NGOs to take Karuna and the government to task for their collaboration in human rights violations.<sup>80</sup> In Batticaloa, meanwhile, intimidation, abductions, and extra-judicial killings intensified with the climate of fear and violence. As the case of mistaken identity for Deepan's husband reveals, civilians were powerless in the face of the TMVP backed by the government and lived in fear of being accosted and accused. Large numbers of displaced flooded into the Batticaloa district where they stayed in IDP camps run by the government and INGOs. Most who moved to the East coast came from the interior areas of Batticaloa; the first wave in January and a second wave of IDPs in April (IASC 2006). Many reports at the time also suggested that many IDPs were being forced to return to their homes by government agencies and the security forces.<sup>81</sup> During this time the TMVP was also able to strengthen its grip on the East, controlling many of the IDP camps and, like the LTTE, using displacement as an opportunity to recruit more children and young adults (AI 2007). As a crucial factor in the government's counter-insurgency campaign, the TMVP were given complete access to the camps and allowed to screen incoming refugees for their links with the LTTE.

**“This is what it is”**

On January 19<sup>th</sup> 2007 another of my sons, Theesan was taken by the TMVP. They took him from home. He had completed his O' levels and was following a course in plumbing. From January 21,<sup>st</sup> I went repeatedly to the TMVP and with others continued asking for him until they released him.

---

<sup>80</sup> The issue of violations was repeatedly taken up by the EU and the UN, although the government continuously denied involvement with the TMVP. In 2008, Karuna was assisted to travel to the UK on a diplomatic passport, which saw him imprisoned by the British Authorities for carrying a fraudulent passport. In his absence, Chabdrakanthan (Pilliyann) took a leader role in the TMVP and following success in the Eastern provincial elections entered an alliance with the current government.

<sup>81</sup> This was in violation of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, to which the government pledged its adherence (IRIN 2007; HRW 2007b; CPA 2007).



Back to Sridevi – she came to stay with me and with her husband gave birth to a baby boy on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Then we came to X as I sold my house in Y. I sold it because of the problems I had with my sister's husband, who I heard had told the TMVP about my eldest son being at home at that time. But then my sister's husband died of electric shock. It was exactly one year after he had betrayed my son to the TMVP. Since then I have been trying to get by. My niece, whose mother died in the fire, has been trying to complete her studies at Jaffna University. However, she had to come back after the split problems because she was scared and she hasn't been able to get back since. She wants to study but what can she do? We can't move about as we want and if she goes there (to Jaffna) will she ever get back to us? I am still trying to get land. I am going this afternoon to talk about the deeds but the problem is that you make an agreement, you exchange money, but even then you might lose out.

I don't want to leave my area now; we are all together there. But my son is scared of being taken again and I don't want to lose any more.

This is what it is.

It was a hot and sticky afternoon when Meena and I completed our series of interviews. By the time I had finished scribbling down the last part of her story, Meena was lying on her side across the mat, her head cushioned in the crook of her arm and her eyes following the movements of the slow, steady fan above us. The room felt thick with sadness, anger and, anticipation; the words that had formed Meena's narrative edged around us on the cusp of tears or a scream. Other than the whirl of the fan, and the faint chatter from the road outside, silence remained in the room. At times when Meena had spoken, there appeared to be solipsism to her narrative. This stemmed not from self-obsession or vanity but from her perception of herself as the fixed point in all of the chaos and discordance. It seemed to me that Meena was always looking for her own edge, exploring how far things could go and, amidst all of the pain and loss she experienced, where she could find solid ground to put her feet. Despite the many fragments and disruptions to her life, Meena's narrative moved smoothly between the *now* of the present and *then* of her past. Although she would distinguish between the two, they were also 'narratively co-present' (Gilsenan 1996: 96); they existed together in the same moment, shaping each other back and forth. While there were obviously details and moments that got lost in the process of translation, the simple act of being there – sharing in the experiences of Meena's life – allowed her past as an active ingredient in her present and future, to come alive. These were all parts of her life story that

Meena remained in the midst of, and with which she continued to grapple; unlike conventional stories, for Meena the story's outcome was far from given.

In conflict, violence creates many traps, blocks, and situations of powerlessness. Yet, in the face of this inequity, strategies of endurance, and survival also emerge. It is the various spaces in which these factors play out that, that Meena can represent a reality of the past that means she does not get labeled as a victim or widow. Instead, her reality troubles the boundaries of fixed categories and pushes us in the direction of narrative histories that acknowledge the positioning of the author and the subject, and do not privilege one interpretation over another. This is the focus of my next chapter in which I consider the relationship between history and the role of personal narratives. I explore the complex variations in recollections of the past to official or authoritative accounts and records and in doing so emphasize the necessity of recognizing moments in history, of noticing where and how people are located within space and time, both literally and metaphorically. Examining anthropological literature on Eastern Sri Lanka, I consider how narratives, such as Meena's can provide an alternative history to the past which does not have to override official and historical accounts but can add to and provide a richer and more textured portrait of any past.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THREADS OF REALITY AND UNRAVELLING HISTORY

About telling people's stories – you cannot take them out of context – you must keep them alongside others. They will tell you about what really happened as well as about how things developed for that person in relation to others. Separate stories are for those who are interested in their career, as something separate from who they are. Here it is a part of who you are and who others are, so you can't tell it apart. History and stories – its life not a career (Rajan 2006).

Over the many months that I was in Sri Lanka, I spent a lot of time trying to learn about the past; through reading historical analysis and literature I examined the various popular perspectives and knew of the polemical arguments presented by Sinhala and Tamil nationalists in their claims to land and country. I had spoken to many people to gather life histories and had tried to develop an understanding that covered as many perspectives as possible. As a result, I knew well the main organizing themes and events with their social and political contexts which shaped and guided what is recognized as the *official* accounts of the past or *master narratives* of history. However it was not until the hours I spent with Meena, when she described to me her experiences of growing up in Eastern Sri Lanka, that the past emerged as a living process. As she talked, my mind followed her to the compound where she played alone as a child; stood with her anxious and fearful at the army camp, as she searched for her husband's body which had been left to peel like an onion in the sun; and I held my breath as she struggled to feed her children and secure land to build a house. This was where I saw a different history unfold, a history that did not separate the political processes and legal amendments from the daily experiences of men and women living in villages where the violence of such decisions is played out. It was a history where the political and the personal of conflict forcefully emerged as a tangle of policy and practice that informed one another in everyday life. The strength and importance of Meena's story, lie not in its construction of reality or its claim to the truth, but in what it tells us about the nature of life in a particular time and space. Given as a variation on, but also framed within the master narrative of the East's history, Meena's story made visible the basis for contextualization and interpretation and the dynamic tension between voice and memory.

The difficulties of tracing a country's past have been noted by many to lie in the competing claims made about the 'truth' of the past and the blurred lines between fact and fiction. These claims are versions of the past which are attributed status and recognition as *the*

history of a place or people. Events which are commonly recognized as significant by the wider public are often located on a timeline of the past, which refers to *a* past upon which they can be mapped in an arc from cause to consequence. Moreover, they can be used as a powerful tool to lay claim to a particular place as home, often enlisting ideological, religious or mythical idioms as explanation and legitimation. History in this sense is not only about establishing the past and defining what happened but also about co-opting and manipulating versions of the past for political gains. Issues like this add a new dimension to discussions that were initiated long ago – to the question of history by whom and from where – and what has been left out?

The genre of narrative and oral histories have come to be recognized as an important part of historiography, particularly for learning how people negotiate the experiences and meanings of violence. Previously neglected in favour of a focus on state and hegemony, narrative analysis, as a method increasingly used in much historical writing today, is grounded in the phenomenological assumption that phenomena are ascribed meaning through being experienced (Eastmond 2007). As Rajan's comment above suggests, history "is a part of who you are", we embody the past and move as part of it through the present and into the future. Furthermore, it contends that an understanding of another's experience is contingent upon the ways in which others express these experiences to us (Schutz 1972: 99-100). In the dynamic interplay between experience and expression, experience gives form to narratives while expression provides its own meaning and shape. Past experience is always remembered and interpreted in the light of the present while the present relies on what we have learnt in the past. Meena's narrative also revealed to us that what is remembered, represented and told is situational, shaped not least through the contingencies of the encounter between the narrative and listener and the power relationship between them (Skultans 1998). Gathering personal perspectives and 'private voices', oral accounts of history can provide the individual element of a private self to a broader, more social collective of people and their context (Mines 1996). Furthermore it can create a greater sense of the complexities of official versions of '*the* past' and 'history as lived' from which the personal representation of 'pastness' cannot be detached (Tonkin 1992).

The purpose of this chapter is to explore ideas of *telling* history as a way of tying together representations of Sri Lanka's past which the version of the history of the East presented by Meena in the previous chapter. Given the personal, exploratory nature of the chapters in the thesis so far, this chapter marks a shift towards a more specific focus on how Eastern Sri Lanka has been represented in anthropological and ethnographic texts. In doing so I suggest that the ways in which Meena's narrative as one version of the past maps onto wider

concepts of home, family, community and country can be clearly revealed. As such I argue that the ways in which oral narratives can be used as a form of history to demonstrate that local, *lived* pasts such as Meena's do not have to be seen as in conflict with official accounts, but instead can be woven through to enrich and complicate them.

The first part of this chapter deals briefly with the difficulties of tracing Sri Lanka's past and of unraveling the threads of history that contribute to competing claims made about the 'truth' of the past and the blurred lines between fact and fiction. I use the shape of a debate between two distinguished scholars, Qadri Ismail (1998, 2005, 2008) and Mark Whitaker (1990, 1999, 2008), who both work on Sri Lanka, to question ethnographic representations of Sri Lanka. In *Abiding by Sri Lanka: On Peace, Place, and Postcoloniality*, Ismail (2005) forcefully criticizes ethnographic representation as inherently violent. In particular, he questions the ways in which Sri Lanka's past has been conceptualized by scholars attempting to understand cultures different from their own, and the subsequent focus on peace and conflict work addressed in post-structuralist, empiricist, colonialist, and leftist texts. Whitaker (2008) however, contends that while the political problems of representation point to the uneasy tension between critical anthropology and its own politics, at the same time this tension also encourages ongoing discussion and questioning, which in many ways can pull anthropology back to a place of self-reflection and learning. Focusing on local-level ethnographic and historical projects, such as his own in Eastern Sri Lanka, Whitaker defends anthropology by arguing that it can produce forms of publically displayed learning in which ethnography remains 'critical' in its ability to provide a form of clear, and often transparent, representation to both those represented and those being represented to.

The respective approaches of both Ismail and Whitaker, provide a useful framework for exploring the many challenges anthropological approaches have faced in documenting the history of Eastern Sri Lanka, while drawing from broader anthropological debates over representation and ethnographic authority. It also relates back to the ethical arguments I considered in Chapters One and Two relating to the relations of power and position of a researcher in Sri Lanka, and the justifications of proposing to *speak for* rather than 'speak to' others (Ismail 2005: xxx). By critically evaluating the various strengths and limitations of ethnographic writing on Eastern Sri Lanka, I illuminate some of the questions and problems that have been tackled in the process of locating research and subjects along the paths of Eastern history and I consider the importance of bringing multiple threads together that can complicate rather than compete against one another. Therefore I argue that by making visible the relationship between the storyteller, the ethnographer and the imagined audience, we can

give authority to less visible personal experiences such as Meena's narrative, not as a fixed truth, but as a critical perspective and 'form of learning' (Whitaker 1996: 1).

## **4.1 Whose History? Official Histories and 'Abiding' by Sri Lanka**

### **Representing Sri Lanka**

As a popular setting for research, including numerous anthropological case studies, and political studies of ethnic conflict, terrorism, and peace, Sri Lanka has been represented in many different ways (Ismail 2005). Countless scholars and journalists have written extensively about the conflict, commonly through constitutional issues such as human rights and refugees, and identity related issues of ethnicity and nationalism. While some have continued to explore topics outside of the conflict, the majority has either focused on conflict-related issues or has found their subject area inextricably linked to the conflict in some way. As would be expected, particular events in the country's past have received more attention than others, and journals, newspapers, and country situation updates, have contributed to identifying what are regarded as significant events or times of intervention. Many of the effects of violence on civilian populations in the North and East are described through the hallmark topics of Sri Lanka's conflict - mass internal displacement, land disputes, child-recruitment, and poverty. These particular events, in war-time as well as in the 'neither war, nor peace' impasse (Rajasingham-Senenayake 2004: 147), have created spaces for particular forms of writing and inspired interest in both the general island-wide situation as well as on a more individual level.

Early anthropological studies however, focused on documenting Sri Lanka through the typical ethnographic frameworks of the time, including the village structure, the home, caste, marriage, kinship and land tenure (e.g. Dumont 1953, 1957, 1983; Leach 1951, 1955, 1961; Yalman 1962, 1963, 1967; Tambiah 1958; David 1973, Goody & Tambiah 1973; Obeyesekera 1964). Jeganathan (1998: 23) highlights the neat division that was made between anthropologists' concerns with traditional communities and everyday life, and political scientists' consideration of the constitution, elections, and political parties. He notes that despite the potential to work together based, in Sri Lanka the two disciplines tended to remain detached. However, as post-colonial times led to an increase in division and factious politics, research could no longer ignore the violence of politics as part of daily life in Sri Lanka. Spencer notes how the violent events of July 1983 (see Pp 81-84), became a defining moment which had a transforming effect on the modern history of Sri Lanka (Spencer 2007: 120). It was after this time that anthropologists turned their attention to nationalism and

political violence which has remained a defining theme of Sri Lanka for the decades since. Much of the literature on Sri Lanka brought out since 1983 has provided an assessment of the history of the conflict, often reducing the complexities of land, people, relationships and experiences to the banalities of ethnic essentialism in order to attribute responsibility to particular individuals or groups.

Political rhetoric in Sri Lanka, argues Spencer (1990), is dense with historical allusion and nationalist claims over the past that are used to legitimize and justify present-day claims to power. These claims have been largely drawn from Sri Lanka's distinctive tradition of chronicle-writing which dates back to at least the fourth century AD. The most prominent chronicles which document the Sinhala past are the 4<sup>th</sup> century *Dipavamsa*, the 6<sup>th</sup> century *Mahavamsa*, and the *Culavamsa*, which is a continuation of the *Mahavamsa*, produced in several stages from 12<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards. The importance of the perception of the *Mahavamsa* as a chronicle of ideal rule is illustrated by the fact that it was updated by the colonial government in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the 1970s by President Jayawardene in a self-conscious emulation of former pre-colonial kings (Spencer 1990; McGilvray 2008).<sup>82</sup> The Tamil past meanwhile is traced back in relation to 'a sense of a timeless and eternally valid Dravidian heritage' (McGilvray 2008: 55). In the Eastern Province where as I have shown, Sinhala and Tamil settlement and politics are historically intertwined, traces of both kinds of historical consciousness can be detected in oral, and textual traditions including a range of local chronicles developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (McGilvray 2004: 55; 2008: 55-96).

The chronicles describe historical events and people, and preserve detailed inscription of specific wars, individual dynastic rulers, and sectarian monastic politics (McGilvray 2004: 55) and as such are of significant value for historians as objects of history in themselves. At the same time, they are by no means neutral annals despite being used *as* history for example to protect Buddhist and Sinhalese people. Focused on presenting the glory of one group of people at the expense of the 'other' (a rival monarchy, monastic order or colonial power for example), mythical embellishment is used for further strengthening the argument of the chronicle's author by failing to clearly separate out narration of *actual* events (as they happened) and embellishments (Kemper 1991; Trainor 1997; McGilvray 2008: 55-96; Gunawardana 1990, 1995; Obeyesekere 1984: 361-380; Goonasekera 2007). Having said that combined with other forms of information such as archaeological evidence, and other

---

<sup>82</sup> Colonial writers such as Knighton's (1845) *History of Ceylon from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* and Tennnan's (1860) *Ceylon* were accepted as the official versions of Ceylonese history in the colonial era and uncritically used in standard school text books in post-colonial Sri Lanka (Rogers 1990).

written narratives a *sense* of chronology can be obtained. Moreover, the chronicles can tell us much about the socio-political context in which they were written. History, notes McGilvray (2008: 56), is ‘not just as a matter of scholarly debate at national level but also a highly charged field of political rhetoric for rival castes, clans, and the ethnic communities at local level’. In this sense, Sri Lanka’s past has been represented through parallel but opposing histories amounting to a master narrative of violence and embedded hostilities, which has significantly shaped public debates over nationhood and ethnic identity.

The use of these interpretations of the past to present recently established markers of identity as historically applicable, enforces the notion that the model of two opposed nations is a *fact* of the past rather than a *fiction* imposed by present-day Tamil and Sinhala rhetoricians. This is shown for example in the text produced by K. M. de Silva (1987), an eminent historian of Sri Lanka, who attempted to provide an original and contemporary version of Sri Lankan history. He argues at the beginning of his text that the problems of perception and subjectivity in relation to history are common to all social sciences, and therefore suggests that: ‘The solution to them is not to turn away from history – for it pervades all of our lives – but to seek a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the past’ (1987: 1). However, in grounding his text on the assumptions that Dravidian Tamils and Indo-Aryan Sinhala compose two pre-existing and distinct racial groups who formed in opposition to one another as the one single, objectively *real* past, de Silva becomes complicit to the constitution of realities he merely claims to describe.

According to Campbell (1998), a similar use of history can be found in the narratives of Bosnia’s past. He claims that many of the major assessments of the Bosnian War have reduced the complexities of the conflict to the banalities of ethnic battles. This is a perspective which has gained visibility in anthropology and related fields through analysis of the crucial role that states play in creating naturalised links between people and places (Gupta & Ferguson 1992). Many studies have explored the processes through which such reified and naturalized national representations are constructed and maintained by states and national elites (e.g., Anderson 1983; Handler 1988; Hertzfield 1987; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Kapferer 1988). Meanwhile oppositional images of place have been extremely important in anticolonial nationalist movements, as well as in campaigns for self-determination and sovereignty on the part of ethnic counter-nations. This is captured by Spencer (1990: 3), when he describes both the Sinhala and Tamil nationalist identities as united in creating ‘official history’ and ‘opposition history’. History, notes McGilvray (2008: 56) is ‘not just as a matter of scholarly debate at national level but also a highly charged field of political rhetoric for rival castes, clans, and the ethnic communities at local level’. In this



sense Sri Lanka's past has been represented through parallel but opposing histories amounting to a master narrative of violence and embedded hostilities, which has significantly shaped public debates over nationhood and ethnic identity.

## 4.2 Questioning History and Narrative

### Abiding by Sri Lanka

Claims over history, and more specifically over the writing of the past, take us back to the earlier debates in anthropology over ethnographic authority and 'thick description' (Geertz 1973: 6) which argue that anthropological texts, even if projected as objective enterprises, manifest the inescapable politics of representations. Such debates illustrate one of the central controversies that anthropology as a discipline has faced, given that its method of research is based upon the very epistemological strategies being questioned. The shape of this debate concerning anthropology and modern ethnographic writing can be illustrated here by the particular exchange noted at the beginning of this chapter between Qadri Ismail and Mark Whitaker.

The overall argument which drives Ismail's critique is fuelled by the emergence of what he claims is an essentialising portrait of Sri Lanka which suppresses internal variation and ultimately treats Sri Lanka as an object. Ismail faults anthropological discourses on Sri Lanka, in particular, for relying on the trope of analogy to produce coherent, essentialist interpretations of entire communities of people (2005: xx-xxvii). Ismail states;

There are texts that abide by Sri Lanka and texts that don't. The latter texts are Western/Eurocentric/anthropological or, more accurately, address the – largely culturalist – concerns of the West, which sees Sri Lanka as a (violent) place of difference. In the former group are those texts that address and intervene within the political debate of a place called Sri Lanka, and effectively understand the country as a place of singularity (repetition with a difference) (2005: 224).

Ismail's line of critique, however, seems more plausibly aimed at political scientists given that one of the core aims of ethnographic studies in anthropology is understand difference and diversity within particular cultures. Ismail isolates texts on Sri Lanka such as Spencer's *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (1990) and Valentine Daniel's *Charred Lullabies* (1996), to argue that in order to complete respective claims to nationhood, both fall into the trap of suppressing internal variation through distorting what is portrayed. In relation to Spencer's text, Ismail suggests that the arguments in the book are simply a subset of the set of all representations but with a political end in mind. In *Charred Lullabies*, Daniel

explores questions of life and death in contemporary Sri Lanka based upon what he witnessed and the stories he recorded in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the 1983 anti-Tamil riots. Ismail criticizes the text for portraying Sri Lanka as a place of violence, 'an object to be informed of or represented to the West' (Ismail 2008b: 192).

Ismail echoes critics of subaltern studies by accusing anthropology of being deceptive on the grounds that it maintains control in the subjective selection of voices while implying that it allows others to speak (Ashcroft *et al* 1998; Spivak 1988; Tarlo 2003: 17). The academic assumptions of a subaltern collectivity become akin to the ethnocentric extension of Western ideas in anthropology in which writing about the 'other' constitutes the objectification of the 'third world'. According to Ismail (2008), this invariably allows 'well-meaning' Western intellectuals to 'speak for it'. To not '*abide* by Sri Lanka' according to Ismail (2005: xx. emphasis my own), therefore is to reinscribe the subalterns into their subordinate position in society (ibid). The failure to 'abide' is further illustrated by the lack of 'commitment to attending to its [Sri Lanka's] concerns, to intervening within its debates, to taking a stand' and therefore, choosing not to '*speak* to the problem of Sri Lanka' (Ismail 2005: xxx. emphasis in original).

### **Who can speak?**

Ismail's argument carries some weight if we take, for example, the texts of edited anthropological volumes such as S. Gamage and I.B. Watson's *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (1999). Here, the stereotyping and orientalist 'othering' of people leads Watson himself to state that 'the romantic image (of Sri Lanka) has been sullied; the jewel in the Indian Ocean has become a teardrop', while Bernard Swan claims that Sri Lankans are 'warm, intelligent and hospitable people' (1999: 8). Similarly Margaret Trawick (2007) an anthropologist who works amongst Tamil-speaking communities, demonstrates a patronizing relationship with 'Tamil culture', which can perhaps be seen as closer to journalistic writing in which people and places are romanticized and sensationalized. To write about 'Tamils' as if they comprise a single homogenous group, for example, is clearly problematic as it ignores the enormous diversity of experiences, and background within that a group of people. Though generic terms are sometimes necessary, it is important that they are used with recognition of the differences within. Accordingly, Ismail argues that anthropology is the '*différance* of abiding: it is what defers, delays, and of course the opposite of, what differs most radically from, abiding' (2005: xxi, emphasis in original). He continues, 'Watson's text is an exemplary instance of such anthropology; it announces the

questions that invariably occur from the discursive/disciplinary location of the “outsider” (ibid).

However, Ismail’s point of contention - that engagement is not useful unless it goes beyond the confines of Western-influenced anthropology - has been addressed in the methods of research and subsequent writing of many anthropologists and social scientists as both ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ or perhaps even both. Scheper-Hughes (1992), for example argues that through attempting to demonstrate how work is done in the field, the ethnographer can help the reader develop a deeper appreciation of the ways in which ‘facts’ are built up in the course of everyday participation in the life of the community. This puts the reader in a better position to evaluate claims made and conclusions drawn. Like Whitaker, she argues that the answer is not to retreat from ethnography altogether, but to turn to ethnography that is open-ended and allows for multiple readings and alternative conclusions. In Sri Lanka, there are a number of anthropologists, both local and from outside the country, who have attempted to narrate Sri Lanka’s past in this way. While some have been more successful than others, the overall contribution amounts to a plethora of ethnographic texts, the number and diversity of which demonstrate that Sri Lanka’s past is not just about a simple set of external events and plots on a map which set out the path of history. Instead, such ethnographies contain stories which can question, irritate, and intrigue, but overall they contribute to an opening up of spaces that encourage new insights into lives as lived. Furthermore, as I argued in the opening chapter, attempts to write about Sri Lanka and tell different stories are not necessarily bound by a perceived duty to ‘speak for’ other people but as my own experience revealed, grapple with serious questions regarding ethical and moral terms of writing and representing that does not claim an authoritative voice. This is not always about a duty or responsibility to write but is a negotiation of the everyday realities of risk and silence which reflect the ways in which research and representation are irreducibly intertwined with politics and power (Spivak 1988).

Although questions about truth and credibility cannot be avoided when working with oral narratives, if they are to be presented as legitimate versions of history, the extent to which they are able to undermine the narrative is dependant upon how the author chooses to represent them. If a narrative is presented as a truthful and wholly reliable account of an event, then we would expect sufficient evidence to demonstrate it as such. If, however, it is presented as a part of different competing ‘realities’, which hold true for each person, then there is less need to challenge the premise upon which the narrative is based.<sup>83</sup> The

---

<sup>83</sup> I use the term ‘reality’ here as synonymous with perspective as it appears to suggest greater

significance of reflexivity is not that it can solve the problem of writing history and writing about other people, but that it highlights the importance of recognizing the place at which a writer stands and for whom he/she is writing (Whitaker 2008: 182). This, according to Whitaker, amounts to 'ambiguous engagement' with Sri Lankan politics both from outside and within, which enables alternative narratives to emerge and keep questions open. This perspective poses a serious challenge to arguments put forward by Ismail and others that the whole field of anthropology is inherently 'non abiding' and that the writing of Sri Lanka should be left to literature in the form of poetry, fiction, plays and so forth which do not proclaim their own epistemic privilege. The fact that Ismail presents his argument within the language of Northern America, drawing on English language sources and writing from outside Sri Lanka in his own narrative also problematises his claim, making him a victim of his own argument. Moreover, if we follow Ismail's argument through, we are left wondering precisely who *can* write?

### **Locating Meena's narrative**

Meena's narrative, embedded within multiple perspectives of life in the East, provides an alternative history, that fleshes out (rather than contradicts) the bare bones of the master narratives. Meena reconfigures her Eastern world in order to describe and validate her place within its structure of relations. Her narrative oscillates between her personal reflections and wider socio-cultural experiences, intertwining elements of the past and present and re-rooting it through what is remembered from before through what is happening now. Life in the East during the 1990s as described by Meena is experienced through long-term struggles of suffering and each fragment of her story ties and unties threads of the past to expose social and personal aspects of a story of profound loss and endurance. By revisiting the opening section of her story, we can see that one small fragment can reveal how many interlacing and tightly woven threads are unpicked and traced to contribute to a larger picture of life in the East.

The comparison of the past and present builds up a conversation about loss, violence, and expectation, knitting together public and personal events which reconstruct wider relationships and experiences. At the same time, we are directed towards the importance of the subject position, the plaiting together of familiar, personal and collective social histories in narratives which reveal how social and political conditions give shape to how and why we speak. In the secrets and silences that pervade everyday life, the specific concerns of feeding,

---

credence for a way of seeing things and indicates the importance that a certain way of seeing can hold in people's lives. Different perspectives do not necessarily have to be seen as contradictory to each other, but instead can represent their own reality and history of the conflict.

nurturing, working, owning land, and paying dowry complicate the larger anthropological categories of culture, history, person and politics. The significance of these connections between the personal experiences and wider collective ideas is supported by Arnold and Blackburn (2004: 2), who argue that the general absence of ethnographic work on life stories in South Asia reflects a tendency to focus on categories such as caste and religion as the defining attributes of Indian society. Noting that an emphasis on the 'collective' has led to a weak sense of individual agency and selfhood, Arnold and Blackburn suggest that rather than abandon the traditional categories in South Asian scholarship the interrelations between self and society can be found in the role of life histories. They argue;

Life histories enable us to render more intelligible precisely the complex forces at work in modern societies and to reflect further and from more solid foundations on...the major themes that dominate the sub continent-gender, modernity, colonialism and nationalism, religion and social change, family and kinship, and interrelationship between self and society (Arnold and Blackburn 2004: 5-6).

Following Arnold and Blackburn (2004) I suggest that Meena's narrative as a life history provides a more solid foundation on social change, on the relationships of kin to self and of the ways in which everyday life is woven through pathways of loss, hope and grief than a comparative review of history on Sri Lanka. Although my focus is on one life history by exploring the experiences and events that Meena prioritises, by probing the memories of silences and by tracing the weaves of personal and political histories, her narrative can be mapped out to other lives and other histories (Ross 2003: 77). Although history might always be an imposition of a *version* of reality, as long as the location and position of the author is made visible then there is something to be learned.

Ross (2003: 77) argues that by uncovering the unspoken domains of experience, the nuances and sensitivities of narratives can ensure that subjects are not just presented as refugees, child soldiers, widows or victims for example, but can actually straddle different categories and transcend them as their life experiences are recognized outside of a specific label. Here, stories can challenge, question, blur, and transgress existing boundaries and categories to reveal in depth and varied understandings of lives in areas of conflict. Furthermore, as Holland and Lave (2001: 30), drawing from Bakhtinian theory, argue, 'history is made in persons and by persons' and the continual creation, negotiation and revising of strategies and approaches to everyday life in Meena's life powerfully convey the ways in which history is not only made, but encountered and *lived*.

Pulling all of the threads together allows the many strands of the lived experience of conflict to be understood in a way that locates people both in their story and in relation to the reader. As such, the different relationships, temporalities, and spatial orientations that make up the political and social landscapes of everyday life for people in Sri Lanka create a deeper and more revealing picture. Ross argues, 'narration performs the bridge between the event and knowledge, yet in doing so undermines the ontological certainty of the former and the epistemological confidence of the latter' (Ross 2003: 77). This means that we gain a sense of life within its history and that we try to appreciate what is relevant to the moment, to Batticaloa and how best to present it the way that it is. To confirm White's general thesis, therefore, we can see that for there to be an historical account of a conflict's past, it needs to be emplotted within a narrative. This may not be a narrative that is recognized by academics and scholars as representative of critical moments in Sri Lanka's past – but perhaps we need to let the stories of those who have been at the centre of experience tell the history rather than the histories tell us what happened to them. 'Counter narratives or alternative narratives' argues Butalia (2000) expose the feelings, the emotions, the trauma, and the silences, which are more often neglected than seen as part of a narrative of history. However, they do not have to override official and historical accounts but can add to and provide a richer and more textured portrait of any past (ibid). Accordingly, Whitaker argues that his ethnographic stories can be taken as attempts to 'teach' something about Sri Lanka but as a platform for questions rather than answers (Whitaker 1996: 9).

## **4.3 Eastern Sri Lanka: A Present Moment in History**

### **Reflecting on the past**

Heightened consciousness of reflexivity in fieldwork and writing sharpens attention to two issues – standpoint and the power dynamic of self and other. Critics of anthropology, including Ismail, have argued that relations of self and other are central to the dilemma of cultural difference, which is played out through the politics of representation and also the politics of anthropology as a discipline. This invokes issues around generalization, of which anthropologists need to be wary especially in terms of creating ideas about 'cultures' in terms of a homogenized, timeless sense of a people and place. Relating this to ways in which the past life of Eastern Sri Lanka has been written in the final section of this chapter I explore how anthropologists working in Eastern Sri Lanka have dealt with issues of writing and representation. My concern here is location; that is, location in terms of how events and particular periods of time have been located in Eastern Sri Lanka's history of conflict, how the anthropologists have located themselves in terms of representation and transparency and further, how this has played out in terms of the dynamics of self and other.

In Eastern Sri Lanka, anthropologists such as Dennis McGilvray, Mark Whitaker, Patricia Lawrence, Margaret Trawick and others have maintained long-term engagements with the place and people, and sought to bring out an alternative sense of the meanings of everyday life from various perspectives. Whitaker has drawn attention to the complicated situation of life on the East coast, as revealed through the multiple, fragmentary narratives that arise in one particular moment. He claims that these create difficulties in addressing how to embed the details in context (as a means of explaining the world from which they arise) when any attempt to explain the wider background will always be seen as a form of representation. Whitaker points specifically to the actual lived outcome of the politics of representation, which in a politically sensitive and fragile region such as the East can amount to more than just semantics. For those who are represented, it is not simply a case of how this is best done, but what keeps them out of harm's way. Whitaker uses the term 'the play of shadows' to describe the level of the visible belying the fear and pain underneath. He argues that Batticaloa was 'in a state of representational collapse, of – to use Taussig's term – "epistemic murk" (1987) – where anyone, man or woman, could mean anything, be playing to any audience, for mortal stakes' (1996: 1). As I argued in Chapter One, the politics of representation in Eastern Sri Lanka involve not only questions of representation such as where people are located, who they are speaking about/for and who is being addressed, but can also influence the future of other people's lives. As Whitaker (1996: 4) suggests, 'to engage in the wrong performance, the wrong act of representation, the wrong audience, could mean death'. This is something that has to be considered alongside the critical recognition of the position, voice and text of the anthropologist.

In a recent paper, McGilvray (2006), an anthropologist with a long history with the East documents some of the ways in which his research site has been transformed from a 'secluded coast' in the 1970s to a region shaped by social change, ethnic conflict, and natural catastrophe. He claims, for example, that many of the military campaigns played out in the East redirected 'attention away from the central topics of [my] earlier research – kinship, caste, ritual – to issues of violence, suffering, displacement, and diasporas' (ibid: 378). The intention of the paper is to provide a retrospective reflection on the ethnographic realities of doing research in the East and on McGilvray's role as author. Reflecting on the many years he had been visiting Sri Lanka, he explores the ways in which his work specifically, as research in Sri Lanka more generally, has responded, both directly and indirectly, to the ethnographic realities of social change and protracted civil war. As representation, rather than documentation of reality, narratives become methodologically more complex, but also open up theoretically more interesting possibilities: for one, they make room for a more

dynamic view of the individual as subject, acting in the world and reflecting on that action. As such, they also provide an opportunity or entry point for grasping the interplay between self and society, letting us see the ‘subjective mapping of experience, the working out of a culture and a social system’ that is often obscured in typifying accounts (Behar 1990: 225). They can tell us something about how social actors, from a social position and cultural vantage point, make sense of their world (Eastmond 2007: 251).

McGilvray’s paper is shaped by a discussion about the recent calls for a new ‘public anthropology’ to promote greater visibility and relevancy for ethnographic research. He looks at what this means for an anthropologist like himself, whose main fieldwork has been grounded in the long-term study of historically embedded social institutions and cultural practices.<sup>84</sup> By tracing the shifts and turns of his own research in Eastern Sri Lanka, McGilvray notes that the reality of the situation in Sri Lanka has given anthropologists little choice, but to address urgent issues. This is especially in light of the changing shape of local contexts of ethnographic fieldwork. This transformation, he argues, is able to cast a different light on important questions raised in earlier conventional anthropological study, which can be looked at in a terms of shift and change, and in relation to broader issues and problems. For example, research into matrilineal kinship structures and the transference of dowry are no longer situated solely within an Eastern village but have to address the relocations and fragmentation of families across the globe. It is thus possible to see through McGilvray’s later research in Sri Lanka how the two types of research topics (those he began with and those he took on) informed one another. In this way, his paper indirectly provides an answer to Ismail’s critique of anthropology in Sri Lanka by highlighting the fact that research has been influenced and unavoidably shaped by the changing country situation and social settings, and in doing so has remained socially relevant and engaged with current debate (McGilvray 2006: 385).

### **Multiple histories and significant moments**

Another example of text that reveals an awareness of subject position and voice is found in Whitaker’s essay on the multiple histories of Mandur in Spencer’s edited book *History and the Roots of Conflict*. In his chapter ‘A compound of many histories’ (1990), Whitaker casts light on the social positions and ideologies of various groups in a Tamil village near Batticaloa in Eastern Sri Lanka as it braces itself for the visitations of Sri Lankan army patrols. His observations are based on extended fieldwork carried out in Mandur during the 1980s, and through which he presents a fascinating report on how multiple, alternative

---

<sup>84</sup> McGilvray defines ‘Public anthropology’ as a discourse which ‘applies local ethnographic knowledge to address – or at least illuminate broader issues and problems’ (2006: 389).



understandings of the past can be drawn on in different situations. Describing a particular evening when the arrival of the army is expected and Whitaker waits with his landlord on his front porch, Whitaker reflects on how the multiple perceptions, realities, and anticipations within one particular context come together. He describes it as essentially 'a moment in the development of one history, the history of Sri Lanka's ethnic troubles' (1990: 161). Whitaker saw this as a significant 'moment' in 'one history' precisely because the multiple strands are susceptible to being appropriated for specific agendas such as political party agendas and claims to land and status. Furthermore, they can be subjected to multiple readings in light of the historically contested claims used to justify Sri Lanka's ethnic war (McGilvray 2008: 56).

Rather than try to provide one history of Mandur or attempt to differentiate 'facts' from fiction, Whitaker (1990: 149) chooses to use his ethnographic observations and experiences in Mandur to trace the multiple different strands of history, of which he claims there are seven; cosmic history; temple history; provincial caste history; nationalist history; colonial history; utopian history; and academic history. He then goes on to look at each of these histories in turn, noting the significance and the interrelationships of the various strands and how they have formed, changed, and influenced over the years. Whitaker argues that multiple strands of histories can be found across Eastern Sri Lanka, where factors such as the role of the temple, of caste and class consciousness and of people's relationship to land can play a part in determining the social, cultural and political shape of their lives. What is unique to Mandur, however, is the specific moment in which Whitaker is able to grasp a sense of these histories working together and beyond that, the particular time at which the people of Mandur had been and were being shaped by the wider world around them. As Whitaker puts it: 'Rather, it is something about humanity, and humanity's comings and goings in the world that have 'enriched' it thus' (ibid: 150). Whether the histories that Whitaker outlines and described would be universally recognized is doubtful and not the point - this is what defines Whitaker's work as *his* particular reality/perspective at *this* particular time. For example, he puts particular emphasis on a group of unmarried males, the *maccan* ('male cross-cousins' – specifically the male children of one's parents' opposite sex siblings, and more broadly all those positioned in similar relationships), in whom he claims hope for the future can be located. According to Whitaker, the significance of the *maccan* lies in their education and learning which enable them to discuss, evaluate, and envisage the social, political and cultural position of the area and its people. Although the *maccan* are caught in the same webs of violence, civil war, and poverty as those around them, Whitaker (ibid: 153) claims 'they nevertheless uncharacteristically evoke a dream of radical transformation that many young intellectuals share and many more *maccan* harken to'. This

group of men is thus singled out by Whitaker as being particularly important at that particular time, especially in terms of how they might influence and play a part in the future of Mandur.

That Whitaker chooses to address the multiple strands at play in that particular moment in Mandur, that he recognizes his own position at that time in relation to the people and the situation more generally, provides a sense of reflexivity and suggests an understanding that is more subtle and layered than simple, hegemonic accounts of the past. While that particular moment in the Mandur compound or the collaboration of the seven histories may not find their way into ‘official’ analyses of Sri Lanka’s conflict, Whitaker argues that they present a history which is epistemologically grounded and therefore significant and important in its own right. McGilvray (2008: 56), however, contends that despite Whittaker’s claims of the ‘false consciousness’ that local discourses of the past constitute, ‘it is still possible to make historical inferences from the available sources’. Noting that there is a scholarly historical vacuum on the East coast of Sri Lanka, as compared with the Jaffna Peninsula (Arasaratnam 1994; Hellman-Mangalayagam 1990), McGilvray is keen to encourage a closer look at ‘a more reliable set of historic benchmarks’ (ibid). His book, *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka* (2008) is a courageous attempt to do just that.

Whitaker’s claim to the importance of multiple perspectives is weakened by the approach of his later work, *Learning Politics from Sivaram: The Life and Death of a Revolutionary Tamil Journalist* (2006), in which he documents a series of conversations between himself and the journalist (and long-term friend), Sivaram Dharmeratnam (better known under his pen name ‘Taraki’). In this book, Whitaker builds up an account of the last two decades based on a conversation, started long ago between Whitaker as a anthropology graduate student and his Batticaloa informant Sivaram, then a radical student of politics and philosophy. Sivaram became one of Sri Lanka’s best-known journalists as founder and editor of the highly influential TamilNet website and columnist in the Colombo *Daily Mirror*, and during the time that book was being compiled in 2005 he was abducted and killed in Colombo.<sup>85</sup> In the book, Whitaker clearly and self-consciously claims to reverse the traditional relationship between anthropologist and native informant and the power/knowledge hierarchies that structure the ethnographic encounter. Therefore, despite being the named author of the text,

---

<sup>85</sup> Although there was no official verdict on his death, it is well-known that Sivaram’s role as a journalist, his background in Tamil militancy (as a member of PLOTE) and being a Tamil from the East (at a time of the factional split in the LTTE) placed him in a highly precarious position (see UTHR 2005 for an indepth analysis of Sivaram’s life and death).

Whitaker creates a space that makes it possible for Sivaram to be largely the author of his life, and in doing so decide what is important to include and leave out. While it might seem obvious why Whitaker is cited as the author, what is less clear is whether the authority granted to Sivaram makes him an ethnographer in this process. The fact that Sivaram, as the informant, is setting the context and directing the structure of the account, does not dissolve issues of intention and audience – in fact they become all the more prevalent. In his review of Whitaker's book, Good (2007) makes the point that in what is written down of the conversations that took place, Whitaker fails to clearly distinguish between what comprises recorded 'verbatim' conversations, and what material he has reconstructed from notes and memory. He suggests that '[a] discussion of the problems inherent in directly transcribing direct speech, and of how Whitaker addressed those problems in preparing his text, would have helped clarify the status of the presentation'. He also highlights the lack of sensitivity displayed by Whitaker in failing to conceal the identities of other individuals who feature in the book. Good also notes that given the fact that Sivaram was killed because of his influential opinions, therefore this is a highly unethical and dangerous mistake to make (ibid). As Whitaker's latest attempt to account for Eastern history, therefore this book is far less persuasive than his earlier promotion of continual contestation and challenge for versions of the past over aspirations of synthesis and totality.

### **Kinship to conflict**

In the early 1990s, Patricia Lawrence, an anthropologist from the United States, arrived in Eastern Sri Lanka with the intention of ethnographically studying women's day-to-day lives and shifting identities in the matrilineal, matrilineal house clusters in Eastern Sri Lanka. Her idea had been to re-examine McGilvray's documentation of the role of exogamous matrilineal clans from a female perspective (complementing the male perspective documented by McGilvray) using her identity as a woman and mother as an entry point. However, what she went on to discover and subsequently write up was an account that not only explored women's experiences, but did so through a rich and detailed documented of the terror and pain which shaped the lives of people in Eastern Sri Lanka at that time. Lawrence (1997: 11-12) states, for example, that when she reached Eastern Sri Lanka, she was met with such an outpouring of stories of disappearances and massacres at the hands of the government security forces that what comprised "'the real Sri Lanka", the writing of conventional ethnography, had been subsumed by violence'

Finding a landscape saturated by suffering and loss, Lawrence began documenting the twists and turns of a historically bleak period. Tying together the narratives of the men and women

whose lives were profoundly disrupted, her research shifted to address the ways in which women in Batticaloa responded to the violent disfiguration of everyday life where decades of contestation over state governance have produced expendable lives. Over a total of 39 months, spanning the years of 1991-1994 with two return trips in 1996, Lawrence explored the fear, grief, guilt, and shame of survivors, and those whose loved ones had disappeared in the conflict. Focusing on the ritual act of possession within a temple compound, she argued that the point at which a priestess, the goddess Kali, and women seeking answers in relation to their disappeared relatives came together, created a community which was crucial to the survival of people's past, present and future. These acts, argued Lawrence, provided coping strategies which were not necessarily obvious or visible, but nevertheless could define whether people kept going or surrendered to the difficult times they faced. In her documentation, Lawrence plait together the narratives of women in Batticaloa with her own to paint a complex portrait of life in Batticaloa, and also reflect upon the difficulties she faced as an ethnographer in that particular context. Trapped by particular histories, contexts, and power relations, she reveals the pressure felt to not only demonstrate self-awareness but also solidarity with those studied.

The many difficulties and obstacles Lawrence faced, including fear and threat, are thus revealed as an important consideration in understanding the context of a violent setting. Like Whitaker, Lawrence highlights the challenges faced in the process of narrating the past from a particular moment, in which the immediacy of the present also raises crucial questions. However, her departure from Whitaker can be found in her focus on the immediacy of the present more than its relevance in tracing the past. By mapping stories onto the larger history of Sri Lanka and the Eastern region, Lawrence's research cuts through the grand narratives of political policies, military strategies, and the territorial outcome of battles in the 1990s to illuminate another form of history from a new perspective. Her emphasis is on the fact that this picture of tragedy and devastation painted of life in the East does not extend diachronically to cover all of Batticaloa's history, or synchronically to cover all of the East, but characterizes the bleak outlook of a particular group of people, in a certain region at a specific time. She also ties her findings to the major shifts in Sri Lanka's master narrative, which gives a sense of how the experiences of women in Batticaloa fit into the wider picture of Sri Lanka's past. This is important as it demonstrates the significance of local events which played out among the experiences and memories of inhabitants of the East, and in turn, mapped life in Batticaloa as 'critical events' (Das 1995: 1) which demand recognition in Sri Lanka's history. Therefore, rather than locating life in the villages and for particular communities through the wider context of Sri Lanka's conflict, both Whitaker and Lawrence

begin from the perspective of the people themselves and illuminate its significance to the wider context of everyday life as a form of history in itself.

### **Temporal markers**

Arriving in Sri Lanka immediately after the 1983 violence, Valentine Daniel's original intention to carry out research on Tamil women's folk songs was dramatically altered when he 'walked into the ashes and mortal residue' of the violence that had occurred in his homeland. His planned project displaced, Daniel began to explore questions of life and death in contemporary Sri Lanka, shaped by the responsibility he felt to document and recount what he had seen and heard. The result was his book *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (1996) in which he recorded the stories of survivors of the violence and engaged with questions of 'how to write an ethnography (or an 'anthropography', to use the author's term) without transforming it into a pornography of violence?' The ways in which Daniel grapples with these questions and their answers provide which Spencer describes as 'a postmodern meditation on what the experience of violence tells us about human nature' (Spencer 2007: 124).

One noticeable way in which Daniel's work differs from Whitaker's and Lawrence's work, and from other texts on Sri Lanka, is in the lack of specific markers to illuminate the ways in which the incidents and people he invokes fit into the wider picture of Sri Lanka. The necessity of this, argues Spencer (2007) is not just the importance of identifying particular moments in time but also the meaning within, and around the particular story being told. Spencer draws on the term 'temporal markers' which distinguish particular research time from 'the past' in general; that is they 'fix particular incidents in a chronicle of political time' (2007: 125). Such narratives, where political unrest and experiences of violence can run backwards and forwards can therefore become lost to 'anthropological time' or perhaps 'anthropological timelessness' and therefore become subject to contest over memory and representation. In *The Anthropology of Time*, Gell (1992) proposes time constitutes a resource, but one in which there entails opportunity costs: 'Opportunity costs arise from the fact that the representations, or conceptual models we make of the 'real' worlds, represent the world as being *capable of being otherwise* than we believe it to be, actually. The world is as it is, but we think it could be otherwise, and it may be otherwise than we think' (ibid). Gell (1992: 69) therefore proposes that temporal subjectivity can be expressed *only* through contrastive terms, which can then allow narratives to be located in specific politics, and history revealing the dynamics of time as a construction and considering each particular representation of the world as also '*capable of being otherwise*'. Violent encounters thus

produce confrontations with individual consciousness as well as cultural constructions of time. Furthermore, given the role that imagination plays in our construction of the world around us, our responses and subsequent expression of trauma, loss, and dislocation are profoundly influenced by what and how we imagine the world to be (Kirmayer 2003; 168; Turner 2006).

## **Narrating violence**

The effects of violence and trauma on the ability to narrate pain and loss can be immense. The ‘un-narratability’ of terror is something that has captured much interest amongst those attempting to find ways of narrating the experiences of violence. In a seminal article on torture and pain, in which he bases his understanding on findings from field interviews in the 1980s with former Tamil prisoners, Daniel (1994) explores the relationship between beauty and pain, arguing that the paradox of culture is that while culture produces beauty, it also produces violence as a ‘counterpoint to culture’. Pain resists and destroys language, as Elaine Scarry tells us (1985: 4-7); beauty, on the other hand, may resist language but always finds another form of representation, another way to carry on what could not be spoken. However, Skultans (1998: 101) disagrees with Scarry and, in an account of narratives from sufferers of violence in Latvia, states that her informants were able to draw upon cultural resources like folklore and songs, to recount their experiences, even though it remained an emotionally difficult task. Similarly, Das (1995, 1997) in an attempt to understand the silence of people who suffer, questions whether pain destroys the capacity to communicate or creates a moral communication between sufferers. Evoking ‘critical events’ that bring us closer to terror, Das finds, beyond bodily mutilation, the mutilation of language that is the ‘essential truth’ of terror. In these circumstances, language is struck a blow, falling into silence. Drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s example of ‘feeling pain in the body of another’ Das (1997) traces routes of acknowledgement and recognition – new constructions of speech and silence – through which social suffering might enter the body of language. This transformation, argues Das, occurs at the level of the cultural paradigms for the expression of grief and the mimetic transactions between language and body by which ‘the antiphony of language and silence’ performed in the genre of women’s public mourning re-inhabits a world that has become uninhabitable in the face of desolating events of violence and loss.

The complexities of the relation between pain, language, and the body, are also found in Lawrence’s study of Batticaloa’s Amman temples where unspeakable violence and loss finds a voice through the body of an oracle, Saktirani. As Lawrence (1997: 10) argues, ‘[a]t the

end of language, her [Saktiranai] body became the agent, a site where truth is made public'.<sup>86</sup> In Chapter Six and Seven I explore the question of silence and the absence of words in relation to the experiences of a widow called Rani. I argue that while trauma's unspeakable dimensions are identified in silence, Rani's experiences demonstrate that silence should not necessarily be viewed only as a legacy of terror but instead as an intimate, and embodied strategy of keeping up routine while simultaneously questioning meaning (see Pp 168-175). This is important precisely because it allows the ethnographer a means of representing experiences of the past including pain but without using representations of suffering and terror to build authority and *speak for* the subject. Instead by sharing speech, or the lack of it, the relationship between narrator and speaker can *speak to* lived realities of the past.

While this lends clarity to understanding the relationship of violence and memory in narratives of violent encounters, however, time remains elusive and ambiguous. Although 'the problem of time' (Munn 1992: 116) in anthropology, particularly in reference to violence and memory, requires wider exploration in order to understand how anthropologists have grappled with such concepts, at this point I want to simply highlight the significance of time markers, for grounding narratives of protracted conflict. Where an understanding and acceptance of stories is hinged upon a shared world of assumptions, ideas, values, and motivations, alternative meanings of silence, in which stories deviate from the accepted exemplar narrative or from the parameters through which the listener comprehends the world, are more likely to be discredited. This can be the case with stories which emerge from places of conflict and crisis where Haanstad (2009) notes 'temporal subjectivity' is often experienced by those who encounter violence. Accordingly '[t]he perpetrators, victims and witnesses of such encounters can be viewed not only as interpreters of particular cultural systems but also as actively manipulating space-time and socially constructed realities' (ibid: 71). Meena's memories of her experiences in the previous chapter, for example, could be seen to have been affected by the extent of suffering and loss she experienced, which might have compromised her ability to recollect specific dates and numbers. The specifics of traumatic experiences such as the loss of several children and collecting her husband's tortured body from the army camp might also reveal inconsistencies, and contradictions, and may not flow in the 'logic' of linear time. This can be seen as exemplifying the ways in which violence and loss can affect the individual consciousness and ability to recall events as they happened.

---

<sup>86</sup> However, all of these factors become problematic when narratives are judged against an 'official' version of the 'truth' as in the case of asylum hearings. Felman and Laub (1992) describe the affective and epistemological difficulties of bearing witness to testimonies of massive trauma. See also Good (2007), on the relationship of anthropology and the legal process of claiming asylum and Kelly (2009), on the processes of the legal recognition of cruelty in relation to Human Rights Monitoring.

This also relates the importance of the inter-subjective character of experience, as highlighted by Das (2008), in providing the ground from which we can analyze the phenomenon of violence. The location of the author in time and space, both literally and metaphorically, plays a critical role in the creation of written histories. Where the authors are writing from, and who they are writing to (in terms of the imagined audience) are issues upon which the writing of pasts and histories become hinged. As an extension of his argument that all narratives are a kind of performance, White makes the point that historical events are different from fictional ones; the former 'can be assigned to specific time-space locations and therefore are seen as events which are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable', while the latter are 'imagined, hypothetical, or invented' (1978: 121). In his retrospective view of research, McGilvray (2006) illuminates the significance of specific moments in the past as 'temporal markers' and tethers each of these moments to different periods. For each moment, he identifies the particular conditions and settings which created it as unique. Therefore, he not only locates his own position as the author but also highlights the importance of the inter-subjective character as providing the ground from which he then analyses the situation.

### **Constructing victims**

Whitaker has argued that proximity to the narrator and to the insider's perspective should not exclude analytic distance, given that the interpretations can be based on a solid grasp of the contexts in which experience and action are embedded. Such stories, properly situated, can rather bring out more clearly the ways in which experience and agency are socially and culturally mediated phenomena. However, a further consequence of separating the subject from a particular time and space is the creation of 'otherness' around the subject and context. In the case of suffering and violence, this can play into the magnifying tropes that have characterized much anthropological analysis of 'ethnic' conflict and stories of violence. Spencer (2007: 124) describes this as the stripping away of the political context of violence, which can push it closer to the kind of representations we find in voyeuristic tabloid accounts. Spencer identifies the work of Carolyn Nordstrom (1997; 2004), in particular, as blurring the lines between anthropological writing on violence and romanticizing or mystifying violence through her refusal to provide cause or explanation for the violence she writes about. Although Daniel is prepared to say more about the violence his informants encounter, he still neglects to anchor the narratives to their specific political context. Subsequently, it is the graphic descriptions of violence that emerge as central to Daniel's work. This in turn means that the informant is written into victimhood, rather than being



allowed to connect with their past, present and imagined future, which would have been located in the specifics of the incident described. As Spencer summarizes: ‘the rhetoric of ‘horror’, ‘savagery’, and ‘chaos’ found in the most recent ethnography produces a similar mixture of enchantment and distance in the reader, while isolating the figure of the victim from the human actions and intentions which combined to create the victimhood in the first place’ (Spencer 2007: 128).

Predeep Jeganathan (1998: 14) pursues a similar line of argument in an article in which he questions why violence has emerged as ‘an analytical problem’ in the anthropology of Sri Lanka. Focusing on 1983 as a turning point in anthropological writing on Sri Lanka, Jeganathan suggests that the shift in anthropological focus became a ‘historical condition of possibility’ for the anthropology of violence in which violence has become an analytical problem, replete with ‘possibility’, innately tied to and defining the past, present and future of Sri Lanka (ibid: 15). Criticizing the particular writing styles that have emerged in Sri Lanka following the 1983 riots, Jeganathan suggests that they detached violence from political cause and explanation, thus categorizing violence as its own object of inquiry. To illustrate his point, he contrasts the focus on 1983 with the way in which the anti-Tamil riots in 1958 were considered a ‘clear moment of crisis in the story of Sri Lanka’s modernity’ (ibid: 15).<sup>87</sup> Unlike the riots of 1983, 1958 was questioned and dealt with as a problem in and of itself within a particular moment in time. 1983, however, was not only regarded as an event embedded within the timeline of Sri Lanka, but also spurred a particular form of writing which catalyzed focus on the apparent incomprehensibility of violence. For Jeganathan, failure to moor violence to the particular social environment from which it emerges is to risk treating violence as ‘self-evident’. In reference to Daniel’s work he notes: “‘Violence’ in this view is an analytical name for the events of political incomprehensibility, events of horror, events that challenge ideas of humanness and humanity, without a countervailing and intelligible political meaningfulness’ (Jeganathan 1998: 46). Jeganathan suggests that the solution to categorizing violence in this way is to firmly locate violence within its social field, which allows the analysis to pursue the ideas of violence without removing it from its context. This can be seen, for example, in the work of Das (1995), where the subjects of her writing are pivotal to understanding how people deal with the violence that has become lodged in their lives. For Das it is not just about documenting the violence that took place but about connecting the experiences through a dynamic relationship between moments of disruption and moments of calm, and to address situations such as violent events as part of everyday life rather than as ruptures to the norm (Tarlo 2003: 5).

---

<sup>87</sup> Jeganathan focuses on an account written by Tarzie Vittachi (1958), one of the most influential journalists of his generation, as representative of how the 1958 riots were interpreted.

## 4.4 Ambiguous Meanings

### Competing claims

Failing to locate violence in its social and political field in ethnographic writing can also run the risk of leaving vague the intentions and motives of the author. This is a problem encountered in the latest book by Margaret Trawick, *Enemy lines: childhood, warfare, and play in Batticaloa* (2007). This ethnographic account of daily life for young LTTE cadres in Batticaloa is one of the most recent studies to emerge from areas of the LTTE-held East, which until recently remained generally inaccessible. The aim of Trawick's book is to understand the nature of children who have grown up during conflict and who, according to Trawick, have never known life outside of warfare. Gathering stories of boys and girls coming of age during the conflict, Trawick considers how children respond to war and how the lines between concepts of childhood, warfare and play are less sharply divided when the children's experiences are considered in terms of their agency rather than victimization (Trawick 2007: 2). Trawick's research was carried out during late 1997 to mid-1998, supplemented with material gathered during shorter visits to the same location between 1996 and 2002. Therefore it moves between various periods of time, which despite being woven through by protracted violence and suffering, are also quite different in terms of the particular forms of control and influence and the shifting boundaries between and within groups of people. The fact that her research was carried out in an area controlled by the LTTE has immediate impact as a unique opportunity to gain access to daily life in a politically charged and sensitive area. Trawick's access to the lives of young cadre in Kokkadichcholai and the relationships she builds with them during the course of her fieldwork unfolds throughout her book with the aim of providing a window onto the lives of young cadres in Batticaloa, which until now have been little explored.

It can be assumed that the stories Trawick gathered would have emerged in a specific context and circumstances, and through which re-workings of a past, present and anticipated futures would have played out. Having access to one of the world's most powerful and dominant 'liberation' movements would have presumably placed Trawick in a highly vulnerable position, whereby her relationship with the cadres and the exchanges of conversation and information would have been carefully monitored. However, Trawick is less concerned with revealing the kind of controlled environment she would have worked in than emphasizing her reflexivity as an observer. She contends 'I was part of the scene that I was describing. I observed myself among others, recorded my own feelings and words with a certain detachment from myself' (2007: 4). However, this reveals a contradiction in terms of

Trawick's claims of objectivity through her apparent 'detachment' from the scene yet at the same time noting that she was indeed a part of the scene and stressing that the feelings and words recorded were 'her own'. As we have seen with the previous texts on Eastern Sri Lanka, the very moment at which the anthropologist is part of the context and working through the relative experiences of that specific time is crucial. It is therefore difficult to ascertain a clear picture of Trawick's position in relation to those around her; or what she is trying to portray.

In the second chapter of her book, Trawick seeks to provide an account of the past and explain how turns in history led to the current situation of warfare for Sri Lanka. Rather than offer an explanation for the conflict, which, Trawick claims has already been done by 'more knowledgeable scholars', she devotes her time to details and ideologies from the past that she believes 'are of special significance in the present moment' (2007: 14). Trawick builds up an account of Tamil history based upon ancient ideology, religion, language, and mythology, devoting a large chunk of the second chapter to the mythical origins of Sinhala and Tamil stories of the past. However, her intention to avoid the confusion of trying to explain Sri Lanka's past means that she ends up largely under-theorizing the body of Sri Lankan scholarship on the East, much of which could tell us more about the history and politics of the area in which Trawick is located. The work of McGilvray and Lawrence, for example provides detailed examinations of experiences of displacement and movement in the East which is central to understanding the local realities of history and politics for people in Eastern areas. Similarly, reports by AI and HRW as well as UTHR on Eastern Sri Lanka document the climate of fear and threat created both by the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE, which would have been evident in the everyday lives of the people of Pudukkottai, where Trawick was based. A number of UTHR reports for example have specifically documented the experiences of the people of Pudukkottai, noting the oppression from both the security forces *and* the LTTE whom they claim run a 'draconian state' (2001: 3). In particular, UTHR's report *The Vanishing Young and the Silent Agony of the Sunset Shore* (2001), reveals the ongoing situation of LTTE leaders demanding one or two children from every family.<sup>88</sup> None of these experiences, despite being documented by numerous human rights groups as well as local peace committees, are attended to in Trawick's work. The contrast of her connection between young LTTE cadres and 'play' and what the UTHR identify as 'a funeral atmosphere' in Pudukkottai due to forced recruitment by the LTTE is striking (ibid).

---

<sup>88</sup> See UTHR (2001) for detailed interviews with families whose children were forcibly recruited. Many parents testify to the LTTE making demands for their children and that the parents who attempted to resist received beatings.

Taking the 1983 anti-Tamil riots as a defining moment in history, Trawick claims: ‘Before 1983, both Tamil and Sinhala people thought of their country as a civilized place’ (17). This not only ignores the violence and race riots that occurred in 1915, the anti-Tamil riots of 1956 and 1958, as well as the JVP violence in the late 1980s (amongst many other violent episodes), but also contrasts with local narratives that I collected in Batticaloa which put less stress on the violence of 1983 and more on the gradual build up of tensions and unrest. Narratives such as the one provided by Meena in the previous chapter note that little was known of what exactly was happening in the 1983 riots until afterwards, since most of the violence took place in Colombo and the South. Instead, narratives highlighted the gradual build up of poverty, marginalization and threat in the East, attributed to the escalating violence in the area. Many talked about the 1990s as the most violent time in the East, when inhabitants found themselves trapped by multiple armed actors including the army, the LTTE and the Indian Peace Keeping Force. Throughout her book, there is little engagement with fragmented Sri Lankan polity and the ways in which this would have shaped experiences of childhood. Although Trawick notes that records are ‘interpretations’ of history and that ‘a historical document is a thing existing in the present’ by failing to bring history and experience together, especially with reference to competing claims on truths, she leaves the reader unsure of her positioning and argument (Das 2008: 294).

Das (2008: 294) also points out that the Trawick’s text leaves no space for alternative stories such as those of the young cadres who have fled the LTTE, or those who preferred not to join and were forcibly recruited.<sup>89</sup> By claiming that joining the LTTE is an ‘important decision facing each child on entering his or her teens’, Trawick provides a blanket argument, which covers many other realities known to those living in the East (2007: 2).<sup>90</sup> Her argument around ‘*villaiyāddu*’ (play), which she claims is a central concept in Tamil childhood and in the LTTE, is also an intriguing one. Trawick documents the Tigers’ involvement in organizing sports contests in which she claims ‘laughter and excitement brought everybody together, refreshed everyone’. There is, however, no mention of the rigorous training of the young LTTE cadres, which the ex-cadres with whom I spoke described to me. They explained that the training was referred to as ‘*villaiyāddu*’ yet involved long runs in the midday sun and beatings for those who stopped or collapsed.<sup>91</sup> This is not to say that Trawick’s claims about the realities of life in Kokkadaichchola are

---

<sup>89</sup> See HRW (2004).

<sup>90</sup> See UTHR (2001).

<sup>91</sup> As revealed in the series of interviews I carried out with fifteen girls who had all been forcibly recruited into the LTTE and had escaped at the time of the LTTE split in 2004.

misleading but rather that a more complete portrayal might involve these competing realities, or at least acknowledge the context of control and power in which this information would have been gathered. This is especially in light of the fact that in order to produce her study, it can be assumed that Trawick would have had to go through necessary channels to gain permission and clear her work with particular gatekeepers before it could be published. Thus, by failing to make explicit these factors as well as neglecting the background and alternative narratives of the specific moment that she was studying, Trawick's study generates the same type of questions about the misuse of power and authority that Ismail (1998) raises.

### **Weaving threads of history**

The texts I have looked at so far are illustrative of the different ways that people have dealt with the problems of narration of Sri Lanka's past. Where Daniel and Trawick bring out the hidden sense of living with violence and the impact it can have on people's lives, Whitaker and Lawrence have drawn attention to specific moments in time and the richness and texture of the many happenings in that particular time-frame. Despite their various limitations, each of these narratives in its own way addresses important questions about how we can narrate history, where and how we can locate the author and the embeddings of the author and the subject in their particular context. In this way, the argument is that we let the stories and narratives of people who have rarely been heard speak and set the pace of history. By pinpointing their own moments of significance and times of change alongside 'official histories', personal narratives can be foundational to an expansion and proliferation of different understandings of a situation and also to opening up the past. In Sri Lanka there will of course always be diverging views and perspectives, but the issue here is that an official line alone can override a whole host of other histories and pasts to which those who have lived out the conflict in the villages, towns and communities of Sri Lanka's North and East attest. These are pasts that recognize the significance of the official dates and times, but add to them a multitude of other moments, spaces, and places, which have personal and social relevance.

To provide a background to ethnographic work which traces the interplay between the various powers and actors at the time is to make possible an understanding of the present, both as far as the dominant flows of information and knowledge as well as counter-currents are concerned. To do so is to move closer to having an idea about what is and is not autonomous, in which way, and why. Freeman (1989: 432-433), in his life history research takes this point a step further, arguing that the researcher's role in the creation of a story is

not ‘an interference with the data, but rather an integral part of it (sic), indeed is the data’. In fact, it has been the closeness and immediacy, often developed in a fieldwork encounter, which has enabled social scientists to create more insightful and relevant texts. Through disclosing the ambiguities, contradictions, particularities, and uncertainties of their work, anthropologists can be well positioned to develop unique insights into people’s social worlds, in ways that would have been ruled out through determinate and fixed versions of the events.

The use of Meena’s narrative in the previous chapter allowed her story to tell a version of the past which I have emphasized as being only one among many others. However, I have also argued that it is a significant and informative one, which provides a unique and alternative sense of life as lived through the history of the East coast. Recognizing that this kind of narrative attracts many problems and questions, I suggest that as long as the biases and preconditions that inform my interpretations are illuminated through a reflexive stance, then Meena’s story can contribute to a multivocal understanding of the past. It also brings me back to Whitaker’s earlier emphasis on the many strands of history at work in a specific time-space framework. It is from this platform of the significance of competing narratives and multiple versions of reality and truth that all of the narratives and experiences in this thesis speak out.

In the next two chapters, I take notions of the everyday and the ordinary as the driving concepts to explore how ethnographic studies have tended to write people’s lives into fixed dichotomies of victims and agents - those that succumb to the devastation of conflict and those that survive. Considering how the ‘everyday life’ of civilians in Batticaloa might be interpreted and understood, I ask questions about the meaning of the concept of the everyday and what the apparent disjuncture between theoretical meaning and ‘lived realities’ can tell us about experiences of daily life. I also consider what is meant by an *ordinary life* in an area of conflict where violence is woven into the fabric of the everyday but also where the violence is not the *only* part of the everyday. I question how to represent this concept as something other than banal and routine but that does not cross over into something that is *extra-ordinary* or outside the everyday.

## CHAPTER FIVE: BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND THE EVERYDAY: QUESTIONS OF THE ORDINARY

In the sweltering midday heat of a bright day in March 2007, my friend Anuloja and I sat outside a makeshift shelter talking with a family who had been recently been displaced from their home. The family had set up their shelter on deserted scrubland, away from the main road and edging onto the barricaded borders of a sprawling government army camp. The area where the family were camped was littered with half buried coils of razor wire sticking out of the sand. Scrawny, flea-ridden dogs lazed in the shade of the trees raising themselves only to growl threateningly at approaching strangers. Washed sarongs and sheets had been hung across a rope suspended between a mango tree and one of the wooden poles holding up the shelter; a few washed clay pots sat outside drying in the sun. A few weeks prior to this, fighting between the Sri Lankan forces and LTTE had significantly increased following a build up in tensions and hostility. The army had embarked on what they termed ‘clearing’ of the East, aiming to drive the LTTE out of their strongholds in the border areas. This campaign took the form of a heavy shelling, which not only scattered the LTTE, but thousands of families too as they fled their homes and villages, fearing for their safety. Although displacement through conflict has become a frequent and familiar part of the lives of people in the North and East of Sri Lanka, this was the largest movement of people since the 1990s.



Figure 11: Temporary shelters in the East (March 2007)

It was just after Anuloja and I had removed our sandals and settled down with the family on woven mats in the shade of a leafy mango tree that the shelling started. The first shell rocketed over our heads. In those few seconds, the ground beneath us shook violently and the noise was deafening. It felt like time had stopped and space seemed to shut down as deep rumbling filled our ears. Without a moment's thought, Loja and I instinctively ducked, covering our heads with our arms and curling into ourselves. The shells were not directed at us, but we were in an open, vulnerable space and they were very close. Although the previous weeks of outgoing shelling from the army's central camp in Batticaloa had familiarized us with the sound and feel of multi-barrel rocket launchers (MBRLs), yet we had never experienced them in such close proximity as this. I had also spent the previous day in Batticaloa hospital visiting mainly women and children who had been injured by shelling of IDP camps. Many of the women had been injured in the back and legs as they had thrown themselves over their children to protect them. One young girl was cut down the front of her face, slicing through her nose and into her lips. The same night, twelve people (including five children) had been killed in a nearby village when shells had landed on their homes. The main news that evening had reported that the shells had been fired by the LTTE, however, when we visited the village the morning after the incident, the families were adamant that the shells had come from the army camp just behind the village. People in the village had been distraught and in a state of severe shock. The bodies of the children had been removed but the blood splattered around a crater in the ground refused to let the evidence of violence be erased. Gesturing over in the direction of the army camp, people had shouted in disbelief "Let them kill us all now, they can finish us. They want to kill all the Tamils".

It was with awareness of this incident that my fear increased. I found myself feeling vulnerable and nervous, and I felt my heart start pounding whilst my body tightened in anticipation of the next shell. Only as I uncurred and looked up did I notice that the family had remained upright, the adults silent while the children continued to play in the sand around us. Seemingly relaxed, they had only momentarily glanced up in the direction of the noise. With a bemused smile on her face, an older woman, grandmother to the family group, gestured over in the direction of the army camp. "*charrianna payam*" (very scared) was all I could understand from her fast Tamil, caught in the gummy softness of her red, betel-stained mouth.

It was not so much the difference between the responses of myself and the family that struck me about this incident, as what I was made to confront in that moment of experiential and potential danger and violence. I found myself wondering what this meant for people in and around Batticaloa, where this was a daily reality. At first reading, the lack of obvious



reaction suggested that the family, especially the children, were unaffected by the shelling. They knew that the shells were outgoing and not directed at them and they had experienced this before. Yet in the way the grandmother spoke and from what the families told us later, it was clear they were frightened. The shelling had not only destroyed their home life and livelihoods, but also their normal patterns of daily routine. They were unable to sleep at night and the mothers were anxious about their children playing outside for fear of a shell landing on them.

As we left the area that afternoon I found myself puzzling further over what this all meant - how the fusion of violence and daily experiences was interpreted in terms of what formed the *ordinary* and *everyday* for this family and others like them in the East. How could an 'outsider' who was both a part of this daily experience and yet found it unfamiliar and extraordinary (even though many events in the East had become somewhat normalized for me) interpret and describe such incidents? It was not only this experience of shelling that triggered these questions. As I described in Chapter Three, living in the East for many months meant I had witnessed the rise and fall of tension and had learnt to recognize and respond to signs and indices of "*suyal nilamai*" (the situation), as people referred to it. I had seen how people's lives were restricted, and yet how they worked around it and the narratives of women like Meena had provided an insight which went beyond the present and took in the years of violence and struggle that people had faced. Therefore, a greater understanding of what exactly constituted the meanings of daily life in this situation felt pressing. I wanted to know how people coped and moved through the 'everydayness' of conflict. Moreover, I felt that there was much more to explaining daily life in Batticaloa than the violence alone. It is this *everything else* of life that shifts and forms in and around the violence which sets the theme for this chapter.

Taking the notions of the everyday and the ordinary as the driving concepts, in this chapter I consider how the daily lives of civilians in Batticaloa might be interpreted and understood in the given context of protracted conflict. Opening with a brief exploration of the ways in which ethnographic studies have generally understood violence through the concept of the everyday, I consider how this has written people's lives into a fixed dichotomy of victims and agents, those that succumb to the devastation of conflict and those that survive. Looking at how the banal everyday has been pitted against the extraordinariness of violence, I suggest that we need a loosening of fixed and bounded ideas that may allow the everyday to move beyond what is mundane and routine, and concomitantly, open up alternative ways through which we might understand lives in conflict. This, I argue, might then allow us to look beyond violence as the determining concept through which the everyday of conflict is

understood, to reveal not only how people suffer and survive, but also how the vitality of the everyday allows people to live around, through, and beyond violence. In the second half, I suggest that to better understand how we might explore the meanings of everyday life, we need to take the concept of the everyday back to its theoretical roots. Addressing the ways in which the everyday has been invoked within the broader reaches of social theory can reveal the everyday as a ubiquitously complex and problematic concept, but also as one which has been invested with power and politics and traditionally presented in generalized abstract forms. The connection between abstract theoretical models of the everyday and the reality of people's daily lives in Batticaloa may seem stretched. That is, what comprises the dramas and details of life for people in violent contexts appears to lie far from the grounds of abstract theoretical debate, which probably tells us more about the ingrained attitudes and political attachments of a cohort of modern intellectuals than about the essence of daily life itself. However, what the theory can tell us is how the concept of the everyday has been shaped within social analysis and how this may or may not fit with the ethnographic everyday explored in the reality of violent contexts. I argue that the apparent disjuncture between social theory and lived experience can illustrate the changes and shifts in everyday thinking, from regarding the everyday as an abstract, fixed concept devoid of experience to a lived present which can be fluid, unsettled and an '*open-ended generative process; as practice*' (Harrison 1999: 499, italics as in original). This both draws upon the narratives and ethnographic examples we have explored so far and also sets up the argument for the next chapter, which takes the question and integrity of the ordinary as the driving concept to consider the lives of a widowed mother and a group of fishermen in Batticaloa.

## 5.1 Violence, the Everyday and 'Everyday Violence'

### Questioning the everyday

The concept of the everyday is both pervasive and paradoxically, due to its ubiquity, is often reduced to a 'banal and unthinking obviousness'. This ambiguity has played a part in creating the everyday as a central, if highly diverse and problematic, theme of modern philosophy and social theory (Crook 1998: 160). Ideas of what make up the everyday are notions of the familiar and reliable; the intimate, interpersonal relationships which are revealed through experiences of what is considered *ordinary*. If we look back to grammatical interpretations, we can see that in both ancient and modern philosophy the everyday has been treated as habitual, static and atemporal. This idea is also reflected in Bourdieu's (1977: 96) notion of 'habitus', in which, he suggests, 'certain things become unthinkable-extraordinary, whilst others become desirable and normal'. Sandwell (2007) notes that the word *ordinary* (from the Latin *ordinaries: ordo-dinis*, order, arrangement, system) implies a

cluster of significations indexing the habitual, customary, regular, usual or normal. Thus “what is ordinary is ‘real’” (Sandywell 2007: 162). He goes on to point out that like the dualism *real/unreal*, the *ordinary* contrasts with the *exceptional* and *unusual*. As such, the *extraordinary* lies literally outside the usual order or normal course of things and exceeds the limits and boundaries of ordinariness. With the *ordinary* connoting that which is timeless and commonplace, accordingly, the term *everyday* implies a life to be static, fixed and, consequently, mundane. Anthropologists have often used the ordinary and its corollaries, the normal and the everyday, as default analytical categories, which we determine by those things, most frequently done by the majority, (Kelly 2008: 353). Green (1999: 41-2), for example, writes of the devastating impact of repression and coercion on kinship and community relations in Guatemala as they are destabilized by fear and distrust. She suggests that the pervasiveness of coercion, even in the absence of war, means that people become accustomed to it as *life as usual*. Similarly, Lawrence’s research (1997:172), as previously discussed highlights the immense fear of the daily killings and disappearances which rendered even the home a place of risk. ‘A day is as likely to begin with the sound of shelling, approaching army vehicles, or the resounding explosion of a land mine followed by a crackle of gunfire’ she explains

We can argue that the limits of categories such as *normal* and *ordinary* are set by what is conceivable within our own realities and understanding, and as such, acts of violence, and the daily experiences through which they are generated, become both extraordinary and unimaginable for those of us whose everyday has not widened to encounter such experiences. However, measured in relation to other people’s lives, conflict and violence are also constantly judged against the way things could or ought to be, which reminds us that an understanding and categorizing of violence can be an extension of inherently personal lived experiences. Therefore, we might suggest that where violence is endemic, it does not necessarily become normalized so much as to challenge the boundaries of the analytical, abstract categories of normal and ordinary. This, then, suggests that there are forms of everyday life in violent contexts which cannot be understood through the juxtaposed categories of the ordinary and extraordinary. For example, where would the shelling described at the beginning of this paper be situated? Given that it is regular, usual, and unexceptional in this particular context, it might be seen as ordinary. Yet, at the same time, it appears to exceed the limits of ‘ordinariness’ and is not mundane or static. So where everydayness has come to characterize experiences that appeared to be firmly embedded in the known rituals of practical life, we are left with events which are not seen as extraordinary in their context yet are remain firmly outside accepted, everyday routines.

A common starting point for ethnographic studies of violence is often the profound incongruity of an indispensable, familiar, but un-momentous idea of everyday with harsh, disruptive, violence. The fusion of such polarized notions reveals structures of violence which can be embedded in social institutions and cultural conceptions and reproduced locally. This, in turn, reveals the importance of exploring the quotidian through everyday experience as a way of understanding the resilience of agents and the brutality of social forces. In doing so, a particular hallmark of ethnographic writing on violence appears, within which acts of creativity and extraordinary heroism are pitted against an oppressive everyday life of violence. Accordingly, the agency and action of those caught up in prolonged crisis is powerfully highlighted. Ring (2006: 178) captures this dichotomy when she compares, ‘the dull, rule-bound drudgery of quotidian existence and the dynamism of “genius”’, which echo through the pages of ethnographies. Green (1999: 7) also states that in paying close attention to the quotidian in her context of Mayan women in Guatemala, ‘one may discern not only the alienation and violence produced by modernity but also the possibilities for creativity that may emerge from these processes’. Similarly Nordstrom (1997) takes an example of a nurse in Mozambique to demonstrate the creativity of resistance against the chaos of war. Resilience is also the focus of Scheper-Hughes work (1996, 2003) in Brazilian shanty towns and South African townships, where she shows how people make lives for themselves under conditions of extreme scarcity and adversity. Vigh argues that by recognizing ‘crisis as context’ rather than ‘crisis in context’ (2008: 7-8), new terrains of action and meaning can be explored, in which people make sense of events inscribing ‘the devastation in the everydayness of life’ (Mbembe 1995: 331). As such, highlighting everyday activities, strategies of coping, resisting, and crucially, hopes and desires for the future, can reveal a social life within a state of ordered disorder (Taussig 1992). This is the everyday experience of living in conflict areas and is based upon negotiation, creativity and endurance. It can be seen both as heroic and ordinary.

### **Victims and agents**

The implicit ontology of suffering and agency, like the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator, tends to ignore the fluidity of boundaries and less than clear distinctions. Ethnographic writing about violence often separates out survival from subordination, and the ordinary everyday from extraordinary violence. This creates a fixed and determining sense of the everyday in a violent setting which prevents us from exploring the everyday as something more than mundane and looking beyond violence to the possibilities of new and different ideas. Ross (2003: 124) argues that when women in South Africa spoke about their agency and roles of resistance during apartheid, they seldom spoke in terms of the powerful tropes

of ‘heroes/martyrs’ or ‘victims and perpetrators’. However, their experiences were most often captured within the framework of violence, particularly sexual violence (ibid). This indicates not only the categorizing of experiences, but also the gendered framework through which women in conflict are often portrayed. Similarly, Meena’s narrative provides less sense of heroics and victims than it does a general feeling of negotiation and strategising to work with what is at hand and take on barriers and hurdles. As such, in ethnographic writing where we gain a sense of victims and heroes, we perhaps lose a sense of what exists in that slippage between suffering and agency where people suffer, survive, resist, and also simply live; the *endurance* of the everyday. In relation to the shelling incident, if only the fear and suffering caused by the shelling is described, even if it is as a daily reality, the unspoken everyday is lost. The washing that gets done, the cooking, relationships, and activities that are woven through the everyday experience of life with violence are unobtainable. Similarly with Meena and other widows across the East, if only the violence and deaths they witness and deal with are conveyed, then the threads of endurance woven with finer details of conversations, dreams, impressions, and feelings are lost. In this, a sense of the future is also unobtainable, rendered hopeless by the tragedy and horror of suffering which is brought to the fore.

If we follow Das’s (1994: 164) assertion that ‘a discourse on suffering is worth having only if it helps the victim to live forwards’ then looking to the moments of hope and imagination, as well as the everyday endurance which drives people, must constitute a core element of anthropological representations of violence and suffering. This could include the *non-violent* spaces or parts of daily life which are less dramatically framed by violence, but often lost to contexts of conflict. Kelly argues, ‘non-violence is often as problematic as violence, and should not be seen as a default state that exists in the absence of conflict’ (2008: 356). Studies need to highlight non-violent times, not in opposition to violence, but as implicated within it. Das (2007: 3), for example, looks specifically to what can be recovered after violent experiences and argues that rather than through the transcendent, it is a ‘descent into the ordinary’ that allows people to live amidst devastation.

### **Sri Lanka’s manifestations of violence**

As I noted in Chapter Four, following the riots of 1983, contemporary literature on everyday life in Sri Lanka turned to manifestations of violence as the sustaining focus of research (Jeganathan 1998). Earlier chapters of this thesis have also revealed that many of the stories of Sri Lanka’s North and East are synonymous with experiences of ‘dirty war’ tactics, which comprise the dominant forms of violence in the North and East as they also did during the

Sinhala youth Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurgencies in the South. It is therefore not surprising that in a large number of contemporary sociological and anthropological studies into Sri Lankan everyday life, violence has become a primary entry point of understanding (Perera 1998). Chapter Four introduced the long history of writing about violence in Sri Lanka which has explored how individuals and communities have experienced, reacted, responded to and coped with violence. Work by anthropologists on Sri Lanka's political violence and ethnic identity as revealed through everyday experiences include Kapferer (1998, 1989); Gananath Obeyesekere's numerous writings on the social formations of Sinhalese Buddhist society; Spencer's (1990) *A Sinhala Village in a Time of Trouble* and Stanley Tambiah's (1986, 1992) focus on the relationship between Buddhism, politics and violence. The latter two writers in particular have explored the ways in which ordinary men and women in Sri Lanka use crude, public displays of support and resistance to engage with violent politics. Such a focus on violence as generated and legitimized in the Sri Lankan everyday formation, Jeganathan (1998) argues, has created 'a problem for the anthropology of Sri Lanka' in which violence is an analytical phenomena in itself. In this sense the everyday has become more about writing violence than the actuality of what constitutes daily life (Jeganathan 1998: 12). In other words, the fact that the questions of the everyday juxtaposed with historical, political and social inquiry into the state's violent practices and counter-state agents of violence have created a specific form of academic writing on Sri Lanka, illustrates how the images of a violent everyday have become almost more powerful than the reality of everyday life itself.

However, the significance of this kind of writing is that it illustrates many of the less visible effects of violence, which penetrate everyday life but are often hidden within the rhythms and routines of daily activity. Thus a focus on fear, terror, silence and suffering can actually illuminate the methods by which people cope and survive. Feminist scholars, for example, have written extensively on Tamil women in Sri Lanka and the kind of strategies they develop to cope with everyday violence. De Alwis's (1997, 2002, 2004, 2009) focus on the role of motherhood as a space for protest and the strategies of displaced Muslim women in refugee camps, for example has revealed the ways in which mothers have sought connections with one another in order to protest and resist and also develop artificial kinship networks to survive the loss of family members. Schrijvers (1999: 321) considers the space occupied by Tamil women in refugee camps whom she argues are creating new spaces by 'renegotiating gender power relations and increasing their autonomy and self esteem'. Although such writing also, at times, falls into the trap of writing the victim and agent through the juxtaposed experiences of the violent everyday, the focus on everyday changes and dynamics reveals more than simply the manifestations of violence in Sri Lanka.

## Unthinking obviousness

Much discussion has been generated by the indeterminate and elusive nature of the mundane social world and our phenomenological relationship to it, which has been dealt with in theories of the everyday. Related questions of concern comprise things which are close, familiar, and habitual such as eating, sleeping, working, and home-making as well as rituals, taboos, performances and other symbolic activities that encircle and define them (Felski 2002: 607). In an attempt to simultaneously bring the primary concerns of the 'everyday' theorists into anthropology, and to foreground moments in contemporary ethnography that might breach the Western-centeredness of everyday theory, Ries (2002: 735) poses two questions. She asks 'Where does the everyday fit into considering cultures, communities, families in *extremis*?' (emphasis my own). And, reciprocally, how does pondering these events inflect our theorizing of the everyday?' Ries uses these questions to highlight what she claims is an intimate link between the concerns of anthropologists who are increasingly working in sites of violence and destruction and 'everyday' theorists concerned with commodification, alienation and rationalization of industrialized nations. Highlighting 'everyday atrocity and atrocity against the everyday' as a concomitant of globalizing capitalism, Ries describes the everyday as 'the place where the most powerfully important things in life occur' (ibid: 740).<sup>92</sup>

The dichotomy of cultures in 'extremis' (conflict/violence) as opposed to the non-violent and 'ordinary' presented by Ries mirrors a mode of writing used frequently in ethnographies of everyday violence. Although this may be a simplification by Ries for the purpose of her article, at the same time, these ontological interpretations, regularly invoked by anthropologists and social theorists, fail to consider what may lie outside this dichotomy and that situations may not fit neatly into such categories. Therefore in addressing the apparent inability of traditional theories to explain the everydayness of situations of violence and instability, my aim is not to separate the everyday in 'extremis' from an 'ordinary' everyday but to open up both ideas for investigation. As such, the questions that need to be asked are what such theories can tell us about the everyday and how we might expand or divert from them to make sense of everyday life in conflict situations. This will allow me to draw from both traditional theories and ethnographic writing as I explore the possible meanings of everyday life in Batticaloa.

---

<sup>92</sup> Ries (2002: 740) discusses the role of consumer and capitalist society as a 'terror machine' in its own right which targets the ordinary through the everyday. She states 'Terror – so well hidden from the view of end consumers – clears the way for and maintains the possibility of oil exploration, mining, the gobbling up of forest, riverine, ocean, and labour resources across the planet, the replacement of localized production and consumption systems with multinational ones'.

## **The everyday in social theory**

An abstract concern regarding everyday life as a site of alienation was typical of much of twentieth century European philosophy and sociology. While experiencing a resurgence of interest among social theorists from Habermas and Giddens to de Certeau and Maffesoli, it has remained a concept that has largely been considered within the parameters of Western modernity. Lefebvre (1991), for example, narrowly defined the everyday and notions of everyday resistance within the borders of his own continent, thus excluding Marxist USSR and Maoist-Confucian China (Ries 2002: 726).<sup>93</sup> Similarly, de Certeau's (1984) 'marginal human' of everyday practice, agency, and resistance, whilst being a more universal figure, still tends to invoke Euro-American imagery in the practices of everyday life. Ries argues that this developed into something of a 'master narrative' around the everyday in which illustrations of everyday life were consistently set in familiarly Western locations. In so doing, it also adhered to a dichotomy of social types in which pre-modern societies were assumed to lack the 'double character' of everyday life in the West. This implied that the character and organization of the pre-modern everyday life were fully visible in contrast to the Western everyday 'organized by social relations not fully apparent in it nor contained in it' (Smith 1982: 92). These assumptions were reflected and encouraged in the historical charting of everyday life in ethnographic research and literary form. Marcus and Cushman (1982: 29) describe the idea of 'ethnographic realism' in which monographs conformed to a generic structure rooted in the structural-functional theoretical paradigm (and colonial interests).<sup>94</sup> Accordingly, the mundane household tool, the routine habit, the banal occurrence and the items of daily production loomed large in anthropological perspectives of the everyday, which maintained a duality through implying a relegation of certain forms of knowing (and being) to the secondary position of the subjective. Therefore anything that fell outside of what was regarded the ordinary and everyday was assumed to be the substance of dreams and fantasies, and part of unverifiable and fleeting feelings accorded to the position of the 'native'.<sup>95</sup>

However, as the discussion about the role of personal and 'master' narratives revealed in Chapter Four, a rise of structuralist, interpretive, postmodern and postcolonial turns in the theory and representation in anthropology during the 1970s sought to shift the perspective to locating people within their own contexts (Marcus & Cushman 1982). Routine habits,

---

<sup>93</sup> Lefebvre's (1991) focus on space and productivity for example was well known in communist and leftist circles for taking root in Marx's category of alienation and the structures of capitalism.

<sup>94</sup> See Ortner (1984); Marcus & Fischer (1986).

<sup>95</sup> Such a path of questioning is now well known. See Deleuze & Guattari (1994); Cohen (1993); and Taussig (1992).



everyday occurrences and items of daily production, though of previous interest to the anthropologist, took on a new significance with these major shifts in theory. Studies started to emphasize and practise the importance of listening; engaging with and reporting local knowledge in a way which allowed those being studied their own commentaries and theories of their possessions, practices and behaviours (Ries 2002), and challenged the power of anthropological theory to render adequately the lives of others.<sup>96</sup> Rather than diminish the importance of the everyday, this critique ironically seemed to bring it into sharper focus. Ries (2002) notes how the combined impacts of structuralism (via Levi-Straus 1967), symbolic anthropology (via Geertz & Turner 1974), Marxism (Bloch 1975, 1983), feminist theory, and especially practice theory (Bourdieu 1977; Goffman 1956; de Certeau 1984) brought previously under-theorized elements of everyday practice to the centre of representation and theory.

The development of such perspectives revealed a shift in focus to ally the terms ‘feeling’ and ‘experience’, where experience does not indicate the past tense, but rather modes of experiencing. Williams (1977: 131) describes this through the concept of a *structure of feeling* - as an attempt to grasp that which is ‘actually being lived, and not only what is thought is being lived’ Perhaps most significantly, this way of thinking broadened out to show that in the everyday enactment of the world there is always immanent potential for new possibilities of life. In response to the limitations of earlier theories of the everyday, for example, the phenomenological theories of everyday approached everydayness as a topic of descriptive social science through which *doing being ordinary* was mundanely, methodologically and reflexively accomplished (Garfinkel 1952, 1967; Sachs 1992). Garfinkel, Latour and others, of which Boden’s studies were an exemplary member (1994), moved away from retrospective overviews which explained what happened and pushed towards dwelling in the world ‘as it happens’. The everyday then became considered as the grounds on which wider forces were played out and the grounds for enactment. This opens up new spaces of action, ‘articulating a second poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning’ (de Certeau, 1984: 105).

---

<sup>96</sup> Abu-Lughod’s ‘Writing Women’s Worlds’ (1992) is an eloquent and fine example of how the subject, in this case the Bedouin women of North-Western Egypt, are themselves the primary voices in the book. Through their stories, songs, poetry, and essays, Abu-Lughod conveys in greater depth the richness and complexity of the Bedouin women’s lives.

## 5.2 The Enactment of the Everyday

### Hidden tactics and daily strategies

Breaking with attempts to think of the social and cultural system as totalitarian and controlling, de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) associated the everyday less with the ensemble of scripted human activities than with unpredictability and creative potential. Influenced by reflexive anthropology, de Certeau explored the position of the subject in relation to the complex weave of everyday elements and, drawing from examples such as walking in the city, he illustrated experiences of embodiment and enactment. In particular, he emphasized the importance of looking beyond everyday patterns of behaviour and into what the 'cultural consumer' actually 'makes' or 'does' within this time (posited in the locus of hidden poetics; *poietique cachee*). Readdressing the top-down bias of Foucault's critique of the micro-technologies of power, de Certeau (1984: xiv) portrayed the everyday as a tactical resistance to the strategies of the powerful and drew attention to the 'inventiveness of the everyday' which challenged the idea of the consumer of the everyday as a victim. 'If it is true that the grid of 'discipline' is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive', he writes, 'it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it' (ibid). As such, de Certeau's notion of everyday, like Lefebvre and others, corresponds to a specifically *human* and not merely technical or material content which designates the limits of the possible at a given moment (Schilling 2003: 38). This allows the everyday to be seen in terms of action and subjectivity, rather than merely confined by structure, and for an emergent ontology to be understood as 'fluid' and spontaneous (Deleuze 1993: 56).

Although tied to specific economic, political and cultural systems, de Certeau's ideas of the everyday can also extend beyond the borders within which he worked. These notions introduce us to an everyday that contains possibilities for action and change. Encouraging a perspective that looks past the notion of the victim to how people resist and rebel against the system, de Certeau illustrates an embodied, specific, sensuous knowing (enacting) of the everyday. This is an everyday that is brought alive by intersignifications such as actions, objects, relations, substance, texture, and shape. If we apply this approach of the everyday, in terms of potential and possibility for action, to situations of conflict and violence, we can consider how people find spaces, chinks in the structure of the everyday, to act on their situations and move forward. In particular, de Certeau's 'hidden poetics' (*poietique cachee*), which powerfully emerge in the wake of human struggle, can provide a deeper reading of everyday violence because they speak of creativity and action which is not always obvious

but knits a solid and resourceful path forward (see also Green 1994). Moving towards the unseen and indicating the edge of semantic availability, de Certeau's argument can enhance our understanding of how people live through difficult circumstances and make sense of conflict and violence by utilising the resources available to them. At the same time, while de Certeau's notion of everyday life may conjure up positive images of trickery and resistance, it also falls short of describing exactly how these take place and the extent to which this is done. The 'mobile infinity of tactics' (de Certeau 1984: 41) appear to be 'fleeting instants' within a homogenous social and cultural life which give us little reference to the extent of the actual "intervention" taking place (Schelling, 2003: 36). Such limitations are reflected in Ries's argument that traditional theories of the everyday offer little space for understanding the everyday in 'extremis'. For although de Certeau offers us an insight into how people may push against a system and search for spaces and openings for change, the lack of *lived* examples beyond those of the Western city make it less applicable to alternative contexts and settings.

de Certeau (1984) portrays the everyday as a site of tactical resistance to the strategies of the powerful (Foucault 1977). However, we could also see daily activities themselves as tactics of negotiation, management (and perhaps even resistance), to ensure continuity and survival. This does not mean that the everyday is eternally removed from what is considered ordinary but that in everyday practical affairs and interactions 'the task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding it in a particular, concrete context, to...understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity' (Voloshinov 1986: 68). In this sense, in all its complexity, everyday life is lived in the world, or in what phenomenologists call the *lifeworld* - 'that domain of everyday immediate social existence and practical activity' (Jackson 1996: 7).<sup>97</sup> Jackson's observations are useful here as he translates ideas of a lifeworld in terms of individual orientations to a social world, rather than a worldview statically reproduced. The lifeworld therefore 'is never a seamless, unitary domain in which social relations remain constant and the experience of self remains unstable. Nor is it ever arcadian; it is a scene of turmoil, ambiguity, resistance, dissimulation, and struggle' (Jackson 1996: 27).

---

<sup>97</sup> The notion of 'lifeworlds' stems from Habermas's (1987: 153) theory of 'communicative action' in which he contrasts notions of a 'systemworld' and a 'lifeworld'. The former term represents the structural or systematic features of an organisation more easily equated with the controlling mechanisms of bureaucratic rationality) – hence focusing on systems integration and means-end rationality. The latter term is represented in the actions co-ordinated primarily by communicatively mediated norms and values. It represents the 'the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet' (ibid: 126).

The everyday lives of mothers in the East whose children had been abducted by the LTTE and TMVP provide an example of everyday actions of endurance which involve strategizing, negotiating and gambling with risks in order to find ways forward. In a meeting that I attended in Batticaloa in 2005 for these mothers, the stories that the women revealed powerfully demonstrated how they sought to push the boundaries of restrictive spaces and map out the landscapes of risk and violence in order to try and find their children. One mother, who had eventually got her son back from the LTTE, berated the other women in the group for being willing to negotiate with those who were holding their children. She told her own story of getting her child back from an LTTE camp in Kokkodaichcholai, which involved daily visits to the camp and threatening to commit suicide if her child was not returned. For example, she noted,

I went to that camp every day...I insulted them so much that they would have had fifty lorry loads of my saliva! For nine days I did not eat – did not go to the toilet – how could I if not eating? Then I went there with a knife – it was actually so blunt that it would not pierce my skin but they [the LTTE] did not know that. At the camp I refused to leave until they gave my son and said I would kill myself if they did not.

The significance of this story is that it is not framed as the narrative of a victim or a heroine, but simply reveals the realities of everyday life as a mother in Batticaloa and the kinds of strategies that have to be employed in order to carve paths forward while dealing with violence and loss. Across Eastern Sri Lanka, numerous stories tell of similar experiences of loss, displacement, and the role that tactics and strategies of the everyday, particularly amongst women, play in creating close networks of consolation, cooperation, social tensions and ambiguities. Therefore to Jackson's observations we could add endurance as part of the everyday scene, through which accommodation of and resistance to the system emerge.

### **“For another first time”**

This sense of endurance can be further explained through Garfinkel's (1967: 9) notion of 'for another first time'. Garfinkel uses this term to recognize the ways in which a familiar commonplace experience or activity is recognized as such. Accordingly, we make sense of events in terms of the differences they make to our lives and how they are meaningful to us in terms of the wider web of experiences and life events. Thus, my walk is *my* walk, my daily work as *my* daily work; my kind of anger is *my* kind of anger and my suffering is *my* suffering as opposed to *your* suffering – all of these are interpreted within a range of understandings consisting of a number of different situations, so that a rule or norm is always

applied ‘for another first time’. This suggests the way in which we re-orientate ourselves towards taking dialogically structured, relationally-responsive events each time an experience takes place. In this way, the particular, unique understandings we arrive at in the different and particular contexts we have with each other depend on ‘once-occurrent events of Being’ as Bakhtin (1993: 13) calls them. Sudden, brief, unrepeatable, unique moments – rather than repetitions and regularities – become of fundamental importance to us. Although it is not necessary to go into the depth that a comprehensive enquiry into these notions would require, what is of importance here is that our understanding of events and our body of knowledge are recognised as living, embodied, responsive relations to our surroundings rather than being based only on individual experiences. Although most examples of ‘for another first time’ draw upon social behaviours within a comprehensible rule-based society, we could also apply this view to an understanding of experiences in conflict situations in which people attempt to make, interpret and make sense of their daily actions and practices. For as Bakhtin suggests, what we perceive as facts – as simple, basic happenings, are seen in relation to an unobtrusive, but nonetheless shaping and directive ‘way of seeing’. It is in the contingency of everyday social transaction that the normative horizon is instantiated and rhetorically formulated, and thus when in the midst of action, norms can be attached to behaviour and actions by means of discursive confections. Therefore, for me, the concept of ‘for another first time’ captures this combined sense of accommodation and interpretation in a given situation and, if applied to situations of violence, can tell us not only about actions for resistance and survival but about what these actions mean too.

Take, for example, the everyday spaces in Batticaloa, such as borders, boundaries, checkpoints and villages which are subject to competing claims of ownership and control. Border villages, especially, comprise spaces which are not only marginalized, but also fracture internally, creating borders within borders. One such border village between Batticaloa and Valaichchenai, which I visited regularly during 2005-6, presented a clear picture of this: located in a government-controlled area, it backed onto a large army camp where the two entry roads to the village passed small sentry posts. This meant that the security forces had the most visible control of the village. As with many other border villages, prior to the LTTE split in 2004, the LTTE had also staked a claim on the village and took official control under the cover of darkness. This meant that families were susceptible to having their children forcibly recruited and some of the locals were paid LTTE spies. After the split, however, the LTTE presence had all but disappeared at night and the TMVP had stepped up their operations in the area, during the daytime and the night.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Given the close relationship between the TMVP and the government forces, it was easy for TMVP



Figure 12: A Karuna soldier guarding a checkpoint

One of the most obvious consequences of this matrix of competing lines of control in everyday life in Batticaloa was a sense of confusion and insecurity. The checkpoint infrastructure contributed significantly to the militarization of the landscape, but was more an institution of domination than a serious hindrance for the militants. While civilians could expect to be stopped, checked, and scrutinized at checkpoints, the meaning that lies within these places can be ambiguous. The relationships between those upholding the boundaries, and those crossing them mapped onto an embedded and variable knowledge of people's backgrounds and allegiances. Thus the fluid meanings they created, negotiated and renegotiated could create a sense of anticipation and fear with every crossing and movement, each 'for another first time' (Montani 1999: 145-171).<sup>99</sup> Spaces are therefore not simply divided by violence and non-violence, but can be imbued with both simultaneously, and the strategy of survival becomes one of *listening* to space; of working out what is happening in the immediate moment based on the past and future and shaping your actions accordingly. Space can in this way embody a search for a referent, for something tangible or abstract upon which to develop a sense of the self and the world. In this way, the strategies by which people re-orientate themselves to a particular moment points us towards a progressive and dynamic understanding of the type of everyday that we are trying to explore in Batticaloa. Yet, at the same time, such arguments limit us to understanding the actions of an individual

---

cadres to gain access to government-controlled villages. In this area most of the TMVP camps and offices were located next to, or close to the security force camps. Young teenage boys with arms identified as TMVP cadre in their unofficial uniform of checked shirts and plain trousers were often seen on patrol alongside the security forces.

<sup>99</sup> For a discussion of checkpoints as markers of identity see Jeganathan (2004).

and fail to consider the social-aspects of everyday action and meaning. Although meaning is created in relation to a wider perspective of experience, it also only makes sense of *my* suffering, for example, in relation to everyone else's. In Batticaloa, violent events have become an integral part of social memory and ongoing experiences, and can define events in individual life histories *and* collective memories. The propensity for violence at different levels of society, in shifting spaces and by changing actors, creates a web of shared experiences upon which groups of people as well as individuals must act. Therefore, when considering situations such as the family affected by the shelling, how they deal with the everyday in relation to themselves, each other, and the changing context must be examined.

### **5.3 The (Un)remarkable Ordinary**

#### **On the edge of life: A descent into the ordinary**

Understanding an everyday event 'for another first time' engages with the notion that events of being, lived experiences, are the beginning of new dialogically structured 'inner social worlds' from which we make sense of our lives, and from within which our 'language-games' have their beginning. Language-games are crucial here, for as Wittgenstein (1980: 31) suggests; 'The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop'. Like Garfinkel and Bakhtin, Wittgenstein suggests that in human affairs - every-day experiences - there can be some *first time*; a new way of seeing, hearing, feeling, judging, and of talking and acting. The importance of these new beginnings lies in the enactment and embodiment of an experience as a new way of bodily responding to our surroundings. Ideas of embodiment are important here because they consider forms of interplay in which language may not be used. Wittgenstein (1953: 228) describes this as interplay of the 'imponderable' kind – in that we are incapable of describing it – but the fact is that as soon as we do, in fact, become engaged with an activity or with another being, we can have an almost immediate sense of that person in relation to us.

For Das (2007), Wittgenstein's ideas of forms of life, in which he takes language to be the mark of human sociality, answers her questions about how, after experiencing extreme violence, the subjectivity of a person can survive; 'What is it to inhabit a world?' and 'What is it to lose one's world?' Noting that violence can push people to the edge or limit of what can be recognized as human; 'a vertical sense of life'; it is in the anticipated end of the form of social life that the significance of the everyday takes shape (2007: 1- 4). Das argues that a form of 'shared language' has to be developed, since 'a possible vicissitude of moments of violence and trauma is that one can become voiceless – in the sense that words become frozen and lifeless' (ibid: 8). She emphasizes the effects of violence woven into daily life

and language in describing how people she spoke to during her fieldwork could tell her stories but with a 'frozen slide quality' to their words. This, she claims, showed their burned and numbed relation to life. Speech, suggests Das, could be 'without voice'; that is the real voice is muted by the violent event, leaving empty and absent words in which the violence endured always seemed to be 'on the edge of the conversation' (2007: 8-10). Accordingly, words carry fear and pain from the past into the present, woven through everyday events and experiences. As such Das argues that 'descending' into the ordinary and paying repeated attention to the most mundane events and objects is what is needed to recover social relationships and connections (Das 2007; Martin 2007: 9). Furthermore, it is through the body that grief and mourning are enacted, allowing the performance of daily activities to interpose and mediate past experiences of violence.

## **Asha**

Exploring the fragile flow of life between the past and the present and between violence and mundane living, Das suggests that the self is made not in the shadows of a ghostly past, but in the process of making the everyday inhabitable. She looks specifically to what can be recovered after violent experiences and demonstrates how violence and tragedy are woven into the texture of individual lives. As such, the importance of the small and routine activities is revealed, demonstrating that what might initially appear insignificant can actually hold the key to re-affirming the possibility of life within and outside the genres that people make available in the descent into the ordinary and everyday. Moving away from the simplistic dichotomies of victim and agent, survival and resistance, Das looks not for the specific role of the subject but to *how* their subjectivity lives on through violence, and how this is conveyed to us through everyday existence. To illustrate her argument, Das returns to the life experiences of a central character in her earlier research, a fifty-five year old refugee, Asha. Widowed at the age of twenty in 1941 following the partition violence between India and Pakistan, Asha says little about her past, including the fact that one of her sisters-in-law who disappeared may have been raped and killed, or the series of betrayals she faced: her husband's family tacitly suggesting that she was somehow responsible for his untimely death; her *jijaji* (her husband's sister's husband) making sexual advances towards her; her marriage of convenience to a much older man that never fully compensated for the loss of her first husband. Instead, she speaks in fragments which tell us that for many women 'the violence of the partition lay not only in what happened to them in the riots...but also what they had to witness – namely the possibility of betrayal coded in their everyday relations' (Das 2007: 72). In short, the partition continued to reverberate in Asha's life in unexpected



ways and 'the past enters the present not necessarily as traumatic memory, but as poisonous knowledge' (ibid).

This reading of Asha exemplifies Das's strategy to delineate the translation of pain and violence in the context of everyday life through the work of time. The past is constantly interposed and mediated by the manner in which the world is inhabited in the present. A similar mode of understanding is identifiable in the writing of feminist scholars in Sri Lanka. The work of De Alwis (2004: 227), for example, which I have explored in a number of ways in this thesis, provides a gendered analysis of the use of space by Muslim women in refugee camps. De Alwis argues that women's everyday life experiences can 'reconfigure and transform the present as well as the future of lived reality within the context of displacement' (ibid). Furthermore, the different paths taken by women in response to the violent disfiguration of everyday life in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, have frequently been approached by feminist scholars through the concept of space, which considers women relationally, within specific settings (e.g., De Alwis 1997, 2004, Rajasingham-Senenayake 1998). In so doing, such work shifts closer to Das's embedded approach towards living in the everyday, which moves ethnographic ideas of the everyday and violence away from the notion of victims, their testimonies and stories, to reveal how the re-engaging with the world is dependant upon the nature of the past. If relationships have been brutally damaged, then the past dwells not as memory, but as lived 'poisonous knowledge' which seeps through interactions in the present. In doing so, Das writes retrospectively to embed research on the past in present forms of narrative.

This, however, is less applicable to my understanding of the everyday, in which the present is explored *in* the present. This is partly because the conflict is protracted and therefore ensnares the present as much as the past. However, more significantly, it is because amongst the people with whom I engaged and the lives I observed, the emphasis was on the present, on what was possible now. While people talked about their pasts and relayed their experiences as crucial tracks upon which their current lives travelled, the essence of their everyday living, their current needs and concerns, were powerfully demonstrated in that particular moment. Meena's narrative in Chapter Three, for example, although a narrative of the past, was embedded and told through the paths of her present life, upon which her ability to make sense of the world was dependant. Moreover, her present and future concerns, worked through with memories and hopes, kept her narrative open and questioning of what life was to become.

Through my focus on the present it is possible to see where and how the past seeped through and how the violence continued, but there is also much more to life than this, which was not always so visible or specifically marked out from other areas of everyday life. In this way, my research also departs from previous work on Sri Lanka, including feminist studies, that highlight the more visible and *remarkable* roles played by men and women in terms of support and resistance to conflict in the everyday (e.g. S.J. Tambiah 1997; Spencer 2000; De Alwis 2009). Furthermore, although people in Batticaloa learn to live with past experiences of violence, they must do so in continuously threatening and unsettled environments where continuation of violence seems inevitable. This is not just violence which emerges from the fear created by fractured relationships and loss of trust (for, as Das argues, fear in the present can be real but not necessarily actualized), but the violence which is very much present in a conflict environment. This creates another point of departure from Das, for in Batticaloa, people cannot so much repair and remake their lives through a return to the ordinary but rather must remake their lives as an *ongoing process* in and around violence. For many families displaced by the wave of fighting in 2007, for example, it was not the first time they had been displaced, nor was it likely to be the last. They lived through layers of violence which affected them at different times in different ways. As Chapters Two and Three revealed, violence could also emerge in multifarious forms as socially and culturally constructed manifestations of everyday life in Sri Lanka. Where the Tsunami took only a few minutes to violently destroy landscapes and homes, the tendrils of conflict spread out through years and decades and everyday lives. As a woman in an IDP camp told me “the Tsunami was just one big wave and it was gone. The fighting keeps coming and coming. One day it will take us all and then there will be nothing left”.

### **(Un)remarkable actions**

Das’s notion of a descent into ordinary life and mundane activity offers a dynamic and creative approach which shifts the focus from victims and agents to everyday living and understanding how people live on in spaces of destruction. It allows us to consider and incorporate alternative stories, which not only tell of the violent realities but also allow living and endurance rather than death and passivity to come through. However, it offers less space, perhaps, for a deeper questioning of the everyday and ordinary and of how boundaries may stretch and reshape to encompass possibilities for (un)remarkable action in the present. Therefore, in recognizing violence *and* the everyday as neither fixed nor static, we should consider the categories of living through violence and the meaning of the everyday as equally blurred. In this way, through addressing the everyday as more complex, we can render an understanding of it as more effective.

This brings us back to the initial problem of how we can understand an everyday in Batticaloa which is both framed and shaped by conflict, but also tells us about much more than just the violence. Having looked briefly at other ways in which the everyday is invoked, I have shown that as a concept, the everyday is not as straightforward as it seems. While it underlies debate which explore the basis of human life, of relationships and of systems, language, thought, belief and imagination, it also evades precise understanding. In Batticaloa, the fact that the violence continued as an everyday lived reality also challenges any clear understanding, especially where the tactics of terror and fear blur relations of space and time. The local dynamics of violence created surges in the intensity of violence and spatial shifts in its occurrence. It was the blurring of these boundaries of violence and non-violence; of restraint and routine; of paralyzing fear and constant movement; and of now and then; that seemed to defy any ontological framework of the passive and active in war and of the lines dividing ordinary from extraordinary. The slippage between categories of violence and of the categories of those who lived through it simultaneously spoke of that which worked through and around violence; that which endured and ultimately sought to find a balance in life. Where theory of survival and resistance may go some way in helping us interpret people's actions and intentions, it does not fully capture the complexity of the everyday realities.

Through challenging the very framework within which the everyday is considered and by questioning its purpose and meaning in relation to contexts of conflict and violence, it has become clear that any explanation must acknowledge that violence does not consume the everyday. Nor does the everyday become *only* about violence. Instead, just as patterns of violence rise and fall, punctuate and flow, expand and contract so can the meanings of the everyday and the ordinary. The most effective way to explore and question the shape of everyday life in Batticaloa and its meaning is to return to the narratives of those at the centre. The next chapter therefore investigates the ways in which violence is understood and incorporated into the ordinariness of everyday domestic and economic life in an area of conflict. By exploring the experiences of a widowed woman and a group of fisherman in Eastern Sri Lanka, I demonstrate the importance of recognizing the everyday and ordinary as open and fluid contexts which allow for multiple meanings and changing frames of reference. In doing so I aim to strengthen the argument in this chapter that poses a challenge to conventional academic writing which relates 'normalcy' in violence-prone areas to peace and productivity.

## CHAPTER SIX: “*KUTTI ANNAR MARAM*” (MY OLDER BROTHER’S TREE)

Often when I asked people about how they coped with the violence in their everyday lives, they would answer something like “This is our life”, accompanied with a shrug of resignation or a bemused smile. This did not imply that they accepted the way things were, or that there was no hope for change, but it instead reflected the general recognition that daily life in Batticaloa - as one of violence and fear - is an everyday reality. Many, if not all, I spoke with felt and expressed some sense of powerlessness and despair; where the fragility of the everyday was revealed, so was the fragility of the capacity to cope and to continue. This struggle is captured in the stories of two women I met after the Tsunami. One woman had lost both parents and her two year old daughter (whom she had waited five years to conceive) in the Tsunami. Her husband, who had been working in the Middle East (having had to leave Sri Lanka for security reasons) had returned for their daughter’s funeral just days after the Tsunami. Two days after his arrival in Batticaloa he was shot dead. The first time we met, this woman told me, “I don’t want to think. I am waiting to die. If the gods are kind I will die very soon”. The other woman I spoke with had also lost members of her family in the Tsunami, along with her home and all her belongings. She had been staying in a camp for the displaced with her husband when he was gunned down as he rode his bicycle in Batticaloa town.

These are not unfamiliar stories of tragedy from Batticaloa. However what is unfamiliar, and what is often left out of narratives, is that daily life still carries on, even after such tragic experiences. This is not simply the daily life of coping with pain and loss, which we would find in Das’s focus on quotidian moments in the everyday, but the more *unremarkable* agency of women to survive violence and displacement as another kind of *ordinary*. Dealing with the present, therefore, and moving into the future, all within the quotidian sphere of daily life, reveals how violence is not the *only* reality in the everyday world. To look for more depth in the everyday and to question its meaning is not to deny that pain and hopelessness existed, or that violence was woven through everyday tasks, but to emphasize the richness of present narratives which can capture the different layers of integrated feeling and experiences. In the encounters sustained, whether people felt like they were holding on tightly or giving up, in some way the everyday moved on. In the many meetings I had with my informants, it was not so much what they told me about their lives, but what was revealed through their actions, interactions, and their bodily movements. For example, when I visited mothers in their homes, many found it difficult to talk openly, yet all the while they

would perform their daily household chores, sifting rice, washing vegetables and preparing fires. While their sense of everyday could not necessarily be accessed or articulated, it was simultaneously embodied and enacted in front of me. Everyday life then became the process of *doing* and performing which was revealed in the embodied encounter between the informant and me. Jackson writes that storytelling events are '*lived through* as a physical, sensual, and vital interaction between the body of the storyteller and bodies of the listeners, in which people reach out toward one another' (2002: 28, italics as used in the original). In Batticaloa this embodiment was also revealed through everyday routines and rituals; acts which were carried out regularly over time to compose a familiar and expected sense of the everyday, but which also challenged life as it was and asked questions for the future.

## 6.1 Rani's Story

### Facing loss

The life of forty year old Rani, illustrates many of the hardships and suffering experienced by women living in the East of Sri Lanka. Like Meena's narrative in Chapter Three, Rani's story weaves through landscapes of loss and endurance, creating conversations between what has come to pass and what might be. There are many similarities between the stories of Rani and Meena: both are widows, both have struggled to bring up children while facing the risk of LTTE and TMVP child recruitment and violence and the cleavages of fear and threat driven through everyday life by the state forces. This is particularly evident in the border villages where many of the Tamil militant groups were active and civilians become trapped between shifting lines of control.

However, where Meena set out to tell me her experiences of the past and to create a '*lived*' sense of growing up in the East as an alternative form of history, Rani's engagement and the conversations with me that emerged spun a different focus and understanding. I met with Rani on numerous occasions over two years. As well as an informant, Rani was also a friend. I attended her daughter's '*big girl*' party (which marked the start of menstruation) and Rani and her husband came to many of the *Valkai* group meetings and took part in one of the tree-planting ceremonies. In 2004, Rani's eighteen - year old son had been killed. At the time of his death, her husband had been in LTTE detention (and therefore did not learn of his son's death until he was released weeks later) and Rani was alone looking after her other children. She had sent one of her sons to work in a garage in the town in order to protect him from recruitment but kept the youngest two with her since they were still at school. In 2006, Rani's husband was also killed. I first met Rani in 2005 when I was out on family visits with the *Valkai* group. Rani had initiated contact with the *Valkai* group after she had been denied

access to her son's body after he was shot and so she had sought the help of an INGO who had connected her with members of the *Valkai* group. They had tried but been unsuccessful in helping her to get her son's body back. Below are my field notes from my first visit to Rani's home.

### **February 9<sup>th</sup> 2006.**

As we arrived, Rani was behind the house washing pots. We called out to her as we stepped around the potholes in the road, which had been filled with last night's heavy rain. Rani appeared from around the side of the house (which was more of a hut), smoothing down flyaway hair with haste and wiping her hands on an old piece of cloth wrapped over her skirt. She apologized because she was in the middle of preparing lunch. Krishna assured her that we were happy to chat with her as she finished her cooking. So we sat down on mats placed just outside the door to her hut. Rani squatted down on her haunches just beside us and sifted through rice grains as she talked.

Knowing the turmoil that had recently gone on in Rani's life, the compound was a wonder of normality; calm and neat. On one side was the small hut made out of woven palm and plastic sheeting that constituted the house that Rani and her family lived in, and on the other, the foundations of a new brick structure. They had started building the new house a few years ago but had run out of money and so the building was never completed. The compound was framed with a woven palm fence pushed deep into the sand. Along the bottom in certain places, the fence finished a couple of inches above the ground where the dogs, had burrowed underneath. There, through the gaps you could see the disembodied feet and ankles of the people next door moving about. Cracked and dusty heels slapped against the soles of old slippers; the jangling anklets of a young child running around. At one point Rani turned to us and dropping her voice to a hushed whisper said, "I don't feel safe. I am very alone in this area because people talk and say things about my son being killed...they [nodding to next door] are being paid by them [the LTTE] to keep an eye on us. That's why I don't talk much". Krishna whispered something back and Rani answered, "they pay them every month. Other people do that too. Nobody trusts anyone".

Rani began to wash the rice in the big steel pot, and as she swirled and squeezed the grains in the water, she commented on how her son had not had a proper meal on the morning that he was killed. She remains troubled about this, she said, because at his death he would not have been in a good state since he was not full.

Each time we visited Rani we would sit and talk with her while she carried on with her cooking and cleaning, or occasionally take a break with us to drink tea. Often the two children would come home from school, tired and hungry. If they sat down with us then Rani would always change the subject. She never talked about her fears for her family in front of the children. But whatever she was doing, the very essence of Rani's everyday and how she coped with violence was silently and unconsciously demonstrated. The swirling and squeezing of grains, fast but methodical, in the preparation of lunch powerfully revealed a sense of her *getting on* with chores of her daily life within the parameters of normality, while also not hiding the pain and sadness that saturated her body and actions. The need for routine seemed to imply some sense of control over external events. Although it might be argued that Rani had no choice in doing this, I suggest that such actions both embodied and revealed her determination, endurance, and imagination of the everyday. Where violence lies 'on the edge of conversation' (Das 2007: 49), attending to the ordinary can affirm the possibility of life by removing it from the circulation of words. Examining how we can conceptualize an understanding of violence in the weave of everyday life, Das suggests that we begin to think of pain in terms of acknowledgement and recognition rather than as a challenge to our own or others' reality and experiences. 'In the register of the imaginary, the pain of the other not only asks for a home in language, but also seeks a home in the body' (Das 2007: 57). The importance of this idea lies in the emphasis on the role of the imagination to challenge and transform unspeakable experiences of pain into actions and the ability of the body to enact or perform in a world where violence lives on. This does not have to be through a broken or damaged body, but through one that keeps going. Therefore, for Rani, the performative force of routine, and her reflection on its meaning and purpose, allowed her to inhabit a fractured present, while also creating space to look towards the future.

Before the death of her husband, Rani had told me that she feared for his life. Having been detained by the LTTE, he was now under threat from the security forces and the TMVP, who might consider him an LTTE supporter. Rani spoke of her worry about him and the loss of her son in terms of the disruption to her daily routine,

When my son was killed it was like I was in dark smoke and could not face anything. I always had this headache – at the top of my head – and I still have that. After my son’s death I could not get back into a regular routine; could not get the cooking done on time and get the house organized – nothing felt like normal. Only last month did I start to get back to normal but I’m not sure – we’re not even safe with my husband released. He may be taken again. We need him to work on the land so that we have some money – the only reason is for income – it’s not safe there. I lost my son in that area and my husband has to go there now. I remain tense until he returns back to me. I may have my children and my husband now but I don’t feel safe.

I can’t think of any place where we can be safe – where can I go? Then I put my son in the garage –I felt he would be safe there. Sometimes people said not to sleep at home – but I said my husband is not here, my son is dead – this is where I live - if they want to come and kill us then let them finish it off.

On one visit, it had started to rain heavily. Sitting inside Rani’s cadjan house, small trickles of rain running through holes in the roof, Rani commented, “when my son was killed it was raining heavily. My mother-in-law gave me 100 cadjan to fix the roof”. Similarly, when I had attended a party for Rani’s daughter’s attaining age, I asked Rani how she was feeling. She had replied, “I can’t say happy because there is something missing”. The absence was her son. In this way, Rani always seemed to come back to the death of her son through her daily activities. Cooking the lunch reminded her of the meal her son missed on the day that he was killed; the rain coming through the roof reminded her that on the day her son had died; and the celebrations for her daughter attaining age reminded her of her son’s absence from the family party. Thus the everyday and the routines, rituals and patterns it prescribed were both a reminder of the past and symbolic of moving on through the present and into future too.

**“*Kuti annar maram*” (older brother’s tree).**

In 2006, Rani’s husband attended a tree-planting ceremony for families who had recently lost loved ones in the conflict. Rani had also been due to attend but this was the time when her daughter attained age and so she was busy at home with the preparations for the big girl



party. Throughout the ceremony, Rani's husband had sat quietly on the cool cement floor, his skinny but strong body leaning back against a wall and his legs crossed out in front of him. To his chest he had clutched a plastic bag which held a framed photograph of his eldest son. The photograph was taken not long before his son had died. In the picture, standing to attention in a neatly ironed shirt and trousers, his son held the gaze of the camera, his tall figure incongruous against the mock background of a garishly coloured flower garden.



Figure 13: Tree planting ceremony

During the ceremony, the photograph had been placed in the middle of the room with the other pictures of men and women whose lives had been taken. They stood surrounded by small hot oil lamps beneath the young saplings of the coconut trees, one for each life. The husband was silent throughout the ceremony. When his son's name was read out and a new candle lit, he had begun to sob. His tears had splashed silently onto the back of his weathered hands as his chest heaved painfully and his body gave way to grief. The families themselves had decided upon the idea of planting trees and had wanted coconut saplings because of their multiple uses as food and materials. The tree was to be an active and 'growing' reminder of the life that had been lost, and one that could be tended into the future. This was not a traditional way of marking death in Eastern Sri Lanka, but it was one which would not be marked out as unusual in everyday village life, and for the families in terms of their fear, this was paramount. After the ceremony, a few of us went with Rani's husband back to his house to help him and Rani plant the coconut tree in the compound.

On every subsequent visit to their house, Rani had pointed out the tree and commented on how it was growing. On one particular visit she told us:

That's how his name (her deceased son) is still here. We are always calling out his name and the tree has become a place

that we use to talk about things - “*That side – near kuti annar*” (older brother). My daughter will ask me for something and I will say “*Toni maram*” (coconut tree). She will then ask “*enne toni maram?*” (which coconut tree?)...I answer “*Kuti annar maram*” (older brother’s tree).

At this point after speaking Rani had turned away from Krishna and myself and seemed to her eyes with the corner of her dress. For Rani, the symbolism of the coconut tree lay not only in its relationship to her son but in the way that it seemed to open up a space for conversation and shared meaning which may not have existed before. In its personification as ‘*kuti annar*’, the tree allowed Rani and her family to keep the son in mind both as remembrance and as a marker of present and future activity and movement. For example, part of Rani’s daily routine involved watering the tree, and therefore she incorporated her memories with purposeful quotidian activity. Furthermore, Rani had told me that if they were ever to leave their house, then she would want to take the tree with her; her uncertainty of the future being marked by a concrete need and activity.

Rani’s engagement with daily life, demonstrated by the physical continuance of her household chores, raises the question of what was happening to her sense of the *ordinary*. We could argue that such attendance to the details of everyday life makes the everyday inhabitable and tolerable, and yet simultaneously, they also make the everyday something more than a simple form of *ordinary*. While Rani’s chores and tasks were part of a routine of necessity and normality, at the same time they were not outside of the severe disruption caused by the loss of her son and disappearance of her husband (taken for questioning by the LTTE days before her son was killed). In this way, Rani’s everyday was not only to do with simply *getting on* in a difficult situation, but also revealed how the everyday was altered and changed to encompass and negotiate new meanings.



Figure 14: *Kutti annar maram* (March, 2005)

Rani's sense of ordinary continued (through her completion of tasks), but at the same time took on new meanings from situations of loss and suffering. These were not familiar and normal meanings but were ratified and understood by an appeal to the wider context of violence and the everyday as 'for another first time' (Garfinkel 1967: 9). The needs, fears, questions, and desires all held within the *ordinary* act of planting and nurturing a tree were a powerful example of this.

### **A fragile everyday**

The importance of the tree also introduces us to another kind of everyday, which moves through the banal and mundane but recognizes the fragility of daily life. Where Rani's everyday life had been fragmented and shattered by violence, embracing new and different meanings allowed Rani continued to live an *ordinary* life – where ordinary meant many things. Where the household symbolized the basic needs, the coconut tree offered a space for escape from all that was real in the immediate present. The tree and the space it demarcated symbolized an everyday that offered the possibility of imagination and hope. In de Certeau's understanding of the everyday, we might recognize this as the 'hidden poetics' (*poietique cachee*) as Rani's creative attempts to find chinks of opportunity in the repressive structure and to use whatever resources were at hand to sustain her life and push for change. For Das too, Rani's actions revealed the ways in which the loss and pain in her life had folded into the recesses of the ordinary as a particular way of inhabiting the world after violence. However, this everyday and ordinary also held more depth and reflection; Rani recognized what she could and could not do; that some actions were for moving forward, others were for keeping still; some were for remembrance and mourning; others held onto hope and desire. This is a different type of everyday and ordinary that symbolizes a need for aspirations and hope for change while working with what is at hand and knowing what can be lost. The emphasis is not only upon the function, reproduction and progress of the everyday but introduces an idea of potentiality and small-politics based upon what is possible in the present.

Where Rani sought to negotiate a path forward through her loss, she also projected a sense of possibility which in itself impinged upon her experiences of loss. In her ethnographic exploration of the expectation and hope of return embodied by Muslim refugees evicted from Northern Sri Lanka by the LTTE in 1990, Thiranagama (2009: 30) argues that 'common loss was creating a shared everyday future'. Rejecting a simplistic connection

between memories of violence and loss and nostalgia for the home, Thiranagama suggests that refugees sought not only to rebuild their familiar everyday lives, but through this sought the space for possibility and change. She states, ‘Return, as such is a horizon of expectations, dreams, and fantasies; conversations about it speak to “a time before” Eviction and “a time after”’ (ibid). As Butler argues, the fecundity of grief and loss, which by nature of their universality make ‘a tenuous “we” of all of us’, can create ties which furnish some kind of political community to address future concerns (2004: 23). De Alwis (2009: 90) interprets Butler’s argument in terms of recognizing space for a different kind of politics, one that pushes the boundaries of what is ordinarily accepted as the ‘political’. Thus to ‘interrogate the ‘political’ via more affectual categories such as grief, injury and suffering, as De Alwis suggests, is also to suggest that we can find alternative paths to peace through the politics of small gestures and working with what is at hand. In August 2006, Rani’s husband was killed. When I returned to see Rani in April 2007 after I had been back in the UK, she grasped my hand and holding it tight said “now we need another tree”.

## **6.2 An Ordinary Beyond Routine.**

### **Sivam and the fishermen**

Looking at the importance of rituals in the everyday highlights the juxtaposition of different areas of life which, either taken together or separately, can hold different meanings. The propensity for different kinds of violence, in shifting spaces and by different actors, creates a web of shared but diverse experiences upon which people must act. In a context of restriction, control, suspicion and distrust created by the militarization of the East, some spheres of people’s lives reflect endurance and necessity whereas others are marked off as spaces for escape from the mundane. Where some spaces and rituals might be about making steady progress forward, others might be less tied to a specific outcome; and while part of the routine framework of the everyday, they also hold meaning, which challenge the normal distinctions of day-to-day routine. The activities of a group of fishermen led by their *mudalali* (chief), a forty-five year old man called Sivam, illustrate the contrast between everyday routines that have a visible purpose, and those that do not seem to work in a conventional way. Sivam’s personal experiences of growing up in a frightening and risky environment highlight the contrast between different kinds of violence and the influence they hold over the meaning of the everyday.

Sivam has been a fisherman for most of his life, taking over the job from his father, who had lived and worked in the same area all his life. This is an area that is built around intimate pathways and small hamlets of houses which lead up from the beach, dragging the sand and

smell of the sea with them. Creating what many might see as a picturesque seaside village, it also meant that on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004, when Sri Lanka's shorelines were hit by the Tsunami, this area was extremely vulnerable and thus one of the worst affected. In the island's Eastern region, over 10,000 people were killed and thousands of homes and livelihoods destroyed (World Bank (WB) 2005). The fishing industry was one of the most badly affected and Sivam and his group of twenty fishermen lost all of their fishing boats, nets and other equipment. Two men in the group were killed and all other members lost family, including one man, Mangal, who lost his wife, three boys under the age of eight, his parents, his sister and her husband and children. Having lost their homes, the fishermen also faced many problems due to the government's proposed regulations for reconstruction post-Tsunami which included a ban on construction of dwelling within 100m of the beach (Athukarala & Resosindarma 2006: 31).<sup>100</sup> Most of the fishermen therefore had to find other land to build on (having refused to stay in the IDP camps which were miles from the beach), and ended up building on and sharing smaller areas of land owned by Sivam.

The devastation caused by the Tsunami added to the many problems the fishermen had faced throughout their lives due to the conflict and violence played out in the area. Working in the outdoors and depending upon a natural resource for their living rendered the fishermen and their livelihoods vulnerable with uncertainty stemming not only from the physical elements but also from the social environment in which human livelihoods and human securities were constantly fought over. Focusing on how people cope with risky environments in terms of the ability to dynamically adapt to shifting risks while constantly seeking to minimize danger and maximize opportunity to secure livelihoods, Bohle (2007: 9) describes vulnerability as embedded in social and environmental arenas, where human security, freedoms and human rights are 'struggled for, negotiated, lost and won'. For Sivam and his group, the dynamics of local violence created many risks which shifted with the fluctuating levels of tension and boundaries of control. Given the context of fear and threat in Batticaloa, young men were particularly at risk of being abducted by the LTTE, TMVP and SLAF. For the fishermen, this risk was heightened by their visibility as strong, active men working out on the beach. At least two of the men in the group had spent time during the 1990s in Tamil militant groups and many of them had been questioned and detained by the army.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> The buffer zone proposal became a major stumbling block for the government's resettlement programme. Prior to the disaster a 300 metre buffer zone had existed but had been ignored and openly flouted by most (ibid).

<sup>101</sup> I suspect that many more of the group had previous involvement and connections, however I was unwilling to question the men on issues of this nature given the prevailing climate of fear and threat.

When I first met Sivam in 2005, amidst the apparent devastation of the Tsunami, he told me that after the 2002 ceasefire the situation with the army and LTTE had greatly improved, allowing them to go out to sea regularly and build up a good, productive and profitable fishing business. The team had increased the number of boats they owned at this time and had built extra tubs and containers in which they stored fish, ferrying them to and from town on bicycles. The sea and lagoon in Batticaloa provided a livelihood and source of income for many, but also became a focal point of contests for power and control. From the 1990s the security forces had attempted to maintain a tight reign over the Eastern shorelines of the sea and lagoon along with the most fertile (for paddy, coconut and vegetables), densely populated and urbanized coastal strips with its access to open sea fishing. The LTTE meanwhile, controlled vast areas of the inaccessible jungle regions of the interior countryside. Sivam noted that despite the overt fighting having abated since the ceasefire, the factional split in the LTTE in 2004, had meant that control over land and people had become even more contested. He noted.

The incidents that happen – shootings and people being taken - mean we are still not comfortable. The LTTE and army come to this area...and other groups. You never know what will happen. I advise my group either all sleep in [your] homes or together in the *varddiya* (fishing hut).

The contested control over the shorelines and the areas of land around Batticaloa meant that the fishermen had to adapt their work to the regular nuanced shifts in the situation and work with what felt possible and relatively safe at that time. Although since 2002 the army were rarely a visible presence on the beach during the day, they were still known to carry out checks at night, and the fishermen told me that some of the soldiers would drink and get violent, often taking it out on the fishermen. On occasions where I found myself staying late at the homes of the fishermen and their families I also witnessed soldiers patrolling the beach area and inspecting huts and tents where fishermen would sleep to keep an eye on their boats and equipment.

A closer look at the network of fishermen under Sivam revealed stratification in terms of ownership of boats and equipment and access to resources which meant that Sivam was less affected by vulnerabilities than the men in his team. Prior to the Tsunami, Sivam owned all four of the handmade timber boats while the rest of the team shared the responsibilities for their upkeep. Of a team of fishermen in Palameenmadu (an East coast Tamil village), Bohle (2007) notes that for boat owners, their asset structures, their participation in social networks, and their access to political power holders made them less economically

vulnerable and equally so in terms of recovery after violent impacts. Bohle describes that boat owners received more financial credit for the reconstruction of their houses, received new boats and nets from NGOs through the Fishermen's cooperative Society (FCO) and could afford to send relatives to more secure areas. They also received better health care and had more chance getting family members released if the police or army arrested them. Therefore, according to Bohle, the abilities of boat owners to respond actively to risks and uncertainties were higher than that of fish labourers and petty fish traders. For Sivam and his team, some of these factors were relevant; Sivam did have greater access to resources, social networks and more influential contacts; however, with the post-Tsunami frantic distribution of fibre glass boats by many INGOs working on the East coast, most (if not all) fishermen owned at least one boat (as did many who were not fishermen). Therefore the Tsunami had shifted resource and power balances by leaving all fishermen vulnerable and then distributing to all, regardless of previous structures and relationships.<sup>102</sup> Sivam's team, however, remained together and sought to replace the four timber boats they had previously owned which once again belonged to Sivam but were cared for by the group (rejecting the NGO boats which they claimed were not sea worthy).



Figure 15: Surplus grounded INGO boats, Batticaloa.

### **Violent environments**

The notion of 'violent environments' developed by Peluso and Watts (2001: 25) is useful here in highlighting the relations between the environment and violence from the perspective of political ecology. The environment is viewed as an arena of contested entitlements in which conflict and claims over property, assets, labour, and the politics of recognition are played out. In Batticaloa, the Tsunami has created another dimension, and despite being a

---

<sup>102</sup> See Stirrat (2006).

natural disaster, in its aftermath it became highly politicized both in terms of the ongoing violence and new conflicts generated by disputes over aid and reconstruction. Bohle and Fünfgeld (2007) for example point out that the total clearing of the mangroves along the shoreline of the lagoon and sea in Batticaloa by the armed forces in the years preceding the Tsunami was disastrous for the coastal ecosystem. This became most apparent when the Tsunami hit the Eastern shores, as the villages bordering the exposed fringe of the lagoon were no longer protected by mangrove belts and therefore were fully exposed to the Tsunami waves. Environmentalists have since found clear evidence that thousands of lives could have been saved if the right action had been taken at the right time to enforce regulations to preserve the coastlines. Damage from the tsunami was much greater in areas where the incidence of violation of environmental regulations was greater (Clarke 2005). For example, the death toll on the island of Simeulue in Indonesia was relatively low partly because of the mangrove forests that surrounded the island, in contrast, however, the uprooting or snapping off at mid-trunk of mangroves caused extensive property damage in Thailand (Athukarala & Resonsindarma 2006). In Batticaloa, there was very little to protect the coastal buildings from destruction and many locals living along the sandbank between the sea and the lagoon found that they had nothing to grab onto as they tried to escape the waves and were therefore washed into the lagoon.

The cross-cutting effects of the conflict and the Tsunami on the lives of the fishermen is therefore revealed most sharply in the context of vulnerability through which physical factors map onto a social landscape of differentiation and inequalities. Access to and control over 'livelihood assets', for example, becomes a matter of shifting power relations, physical destruction of assets, on the one hand, and the transfer of assets from the powerless to the more powerful actors, on the other (Le Billon 2000: 4). Bohle and Fünfgeld (2007), suggest that a sense of the 'political ecology of violence' can help explain the ways in which components of livelihood systems are subjugated to and determined by the logics and dynamics of violence. Although their research is restricted to lagoon fishermen in Batticaloa, and therefore does not consider those who work at sea, their exploration of fishermen from two separate coastal villages in Eastern Sri Lanka provides a starting point through which the violent struggles over environmental entitlements and the politicization of resource-based livelihoods can be explored.



### **Sivam's story**

Out of all the men in the fishing crew, I knew Sivam the best. This was partly because as *mudalali* he was in charge of all activities and so, rather than being at sea, tended to be on the beach or in his home where I could sit and talk with him. Sivam could also speak good Sinhalese and a little English (whereas the other fishermen knew only Tamil), so moving between the two languages we could hold a good conversation. He was also very keen that I get to know his family, and I spent many afternoons playing with his two young daughters and being fed fish curry by his wife. Sivam described himself as a businessman and claimed that he needed to not only expand his fishing business but also find other ways to bring in more money for his family. As well as his immediate family, he had many other relatives who were dependant upon him, including his wife's family, who came from an LTTE-controlled area towards Vakari and had very little income and access to support. Sivam had already brought one of the young girls (his niece) from this area to live with him and his family so that she could be schooled with his daughters in Batticaloa.

Sivam's talk was always of improving his work and helping the group "come up". He distinguished himself from the other fishermen because he had been educated up to A' Level and also worked for some time in the Batticaloa paper factory. He was the only member of his family to continue with the fishing business, and whereas all the other fishermen in his team had small homes on the beach, close to the sea (and therefore all destroyed by the Tsunami), his house was large and well-built, standing on a road named after his father. He had high expectations for his eldest daughter, whom he hoped would eventually become a doctor. As the eldest of nine siblings Sivam felt he carried many responsibilities, although apart from a widowed sister, he was the only sibling to remain in Sri Lanka. The rest had gone abroad to France, Holland, and the UK, where they had settled with their families, returning every few years to visit if at all. This reflects the discussion in Chapter Three (p. 76) about the out-migration of Tamils from the North and East.

I saw Sivam most days during my time in Batticaloa, and in addition to the regular conversations, carried out a number of informal interviews with him. However, I struggled to find out many details about his past life, and in particular his childhood. It was not that he was unwilling to talk to me about his past, but rather that every conversation, wherever it began, returned to his fishing business and his work with the group. For Sivam, it seemed the past had been difficult and at times painful. When he did allow his mind to revisit the past he told me about the many times he had been taken by the security forces and hassled by the LTTE. On one particular occasion in 1990 he had been taken in a cordon-and-search

operation (the army had told him it was because he looked like Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE) and detained by the security forces for fifteen days. Sivam described that time to me as the worst in his life,

That was a time of torture for all. That was how the army related – no talk, only beating. Some they put on rubber tyres and burnt. I was burnt all over and I thought - this is my story finished. But then the day I was released I wanted to hug everybody and cry. It was like a rebirth. This is death and birth for me.

I had followed this by asking Sivam whether he had talked to others including his family and friends about his experience in detention.

No, I did not share much. Only ten percent – I did not share deeply. I told my mother but not about the beatings. She would have been too upset. I did not tell my friends because when they see the army they will get more scared. I want the fishermen to feel OK and be OK with me. If they are scared, we cannot do this. Some of the men are not good fishermen but I keep them with me as they depend on me. I make them do other work on the beach.

His answer revealed the means by which he coped in relation to his wider social network, and mirrored the strategies of silence I have discussed previously in this thesis (see Chapter Two) to protect others and maintain his perceived position of responsibility and authority. This also reflected the profoundly personal nature of such embodied violent experiences, which Sivam had felt should not, or could not, be shared (see Chapter Four p.138, also see Nordstrom 1998; Daniel 1994; Das 1995). It also signified the connection and flow between his past and his present and what emerged as most significant in his everyday concerns. The importance lay with balancing the past and present with the productivity of everyday as a means of getting on. This, for Sivam, was not a denial of the past or suspension of the future, but focusing on the richness of the present moment which held the many meanings of the everyday within it.

### **Getting on: returning to sea without a catch**

Like Rani, Sivam and his team's experience of the everyday was revealed through their daily performance of activities and tasks. The strong, sturdy bodies of all of the fishermen, darkened by the sun, reflected the amount of time and energy that was put into their fishing; the dragging in of huge, water-saturated, heavy nets, mending of boats and the regular travel to and from town with huge crates of fish to be sold. The other group members did not talk to me much, which seemed more due to my age and gender than the language barrier. Every day this group of men, in checked sarongs wrapped and tucked tightly around their waists or old knee-length shorts, would haul huge nets dancing with fish out of the water. Some of the group would dive beneath the waves to help ease the nets gently off the sea bed (which was covered in Tsunami debris), while others staggered ashore and dripping wet, quickly spread the slippery catch out to dry in the sun. Many of the local children would join me to gawp at the dying fish quivering and gasping for their last breaths on the wet sand. Each member of the team played a role and often, when the catches were large, the wives and children would hurry down towards the sea to assist in pulling in the nets; theirs was an everyday of constant activity, movement and routine. The activities of Sivam and the other fishermen presented an interesting contrast to the daily lives and experiences of Anuloja, Meena, Rani and many of the mothers in the border villages with whom I spent time. Amongst these women, there was always talk of what more could be done, what the risks and threats were, what boundaries could be pushed against and what spaces could be kept open. The narrative of the mother who sought after her child in the LTTE camp in the previous chapter, for example, demonstrated her constant, active attempts to keep pushing at the obstacles that blocked her.

Meena's narrative in Chapter Three also revealed her everyday experiences of working around restrictions and limitations in order to find better paths forward. In contrast, the *getting on* of the fishermen seemed to be more about passively working with what was available within the given boundaries and restrictions, to keep going out to sea and keep up a routine so that they could earn money for their families and keep the business alive. Yet, this was not an *ordinary* that was any less invested with hope and change for the future than those who worked more actively. Sivam's constant return to the present everyday in his narratives reflected this. Although their activities were less about pushing for new spaces and more about keeping present spaces open, the fishermen seemed to question and challenge the everyday as much as anyone else. Their focus on *getting on* did not seek immediate change but rather presented a kind of action that worked with what was available, was familiar and was safe. The routine of fishing marked a step by step approach to daily life which

simultaneously reflected mundane repetition, and also powerfully revealed a reflexive approach to the meaning of these rituals.



Figure 16: Bringing in the nets, Batticaloa fishermen (2005)

A clear example of this was when the fishermen went out to sea when there was no catch. For many weeks after the Tsunami, the fishermen took out a borrowed single fiberglass boat, pushing out onto the waves and guiding it round in the semi-circle to drop the small number of ripped nets that remained. All the fishermen knew that there were very few fish in the sea at this time, the Tsunami having disrupted the balance of the seabed and filled the sea with debris. Furthermore, few people were eating fish as rumours had spread soon after the disaster that fish were feeding on the bodies of those washed out to sea. Yet the fishermen still returned to the sea. As Sivam told me,

We wanted to show them [locals] that we could go back out there. So many people said we shouldn't. My wife was scared and my family even rang from abroad to tell me not to go back to the sea and that they would support me to do something different. At that time [of the Tsunami] I thought I should leave this work and go abroad. I can't come up from this now. No chance for me. But after one week I got confidence. After one week the fishermen and I went to the beach and looked around and shared our experiences. I was thinking and the others said my thoughts "We will start!" Then I talked to a friend and we got old nets and a boat. We were all scared but we knew we had to do it. We knew there was no fish. That day we took the boat...it was about two

weeks after the Tsunami. It was not the right kind of boat – we lost all of ours in the Tsunami – but we went in it anyway. The sea was very disturbed and rough. There were no fish. We went to sea and we showed them. I told the other fishermen “We can take the boat out and die at sea – but at least we can say we did it”.

This idea of keeping up routine without the active pursuit of outcome unsettles the accepted ideas of the everyday, which speak of purposeful and obvious activity. We might say that on one level this is a pattern of the *meaningless ordinary everyday* that one descends into in order to survive and cope with loss (of lives and of income). Reports of the dramatically changed status and loss of role for men in the aftermath of the Tsunami support this idea because findings show that a disproportionate number of those killed by the Tsunami were women and young girls, and therefore men have found themselves experiencing serious difficulties and having to take on unfamiliar tasks.<sup>103</sup> This relates to a wider argument about the gendered effects of violence discussed in Chapter Three in relation to Meena’s experiences as a widow. It suggests that in comparison to men, women are more able to cope with loss due to their domestic responsibilities, having to care for their offspring and the new demands placed on them by the loss of their male counterparts. As I previously noted, in Sri Lanka’s conflict areas women have had to take on new roles as principal income generators and heads of household throughout the war (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1998). However, as much as we cannot assume that this is a straightforward case of ‘empowerment’ for women (as the rhetoric of victim and agent may imply), we cannot assume either that returning to sea was a meaningless form of coping. Rather, I suggest that this is an everyday and ordinary that goes far beyond routine and acceptance, for it is imbued with an investment in possibility and making use of what is at hand.

## 6.3 Maintaining an *ordinary everyday*

### Balancing the everyday

Like Rani, the fishermen were reflexively aware of the nature of what they were doing; creating an ongoing dialogue with themselves as they pursued their activities; they remained aware of daily needs and the fragility and preciousness of each day. For the fishermen, it also meant that when they returned to sea, they were establishing and remaking their meaning

---

<sup>103</sup> A survey on the impact of the Tsunami carried out by the Suriya Women’s Development Centre in Batticaloa found that 64% of children and 91% of adults who died were female. One of the main reasons given was that the time the Tsunami struck coincided with women taking their morning bath in the sea (Emmanuel 2005)

and identity as well as doing something *ordinary* to keep going. Furthermore, far from being an individual and isolating task of re-engaging with the world, this held collective and relational meaning which connected the men through threads of meaning both within and outside the performance of the everyday. In this way the everyday emerges not just as a matter of just reproducing the same thing over and over again, but is also a reaction that can step away from the mundane by challenging the accepted and asking questions of the ordinary. This can be rooted in the significance of finding a balance in daily life. The awareness of restrictions and boundaries means that people struggle to create something manageable in balance with the greater scheme of things; persons, relatives, ancestors, histories, and religion for example. For the Acholi people in Northern Uganda, Finnström (2008) describes this in terms of creating 'good surroundings' (*piny maber*) where conditions are frequently described as 'bad surroundings' (*piny marac*). He writes, 'The young Acholi did not passively wait for future solutions; rather in everyday life they built for a future despite displacement and social unrest...and good surroundings were about living under endurable conditions where future could be imagined and planned' (Finnström 2008: 14).

Finding balance also highlights the fact that the everyday is not static but rather generates a cycle of awareness; finding balance - dealing with fracture - finding balance. In this way the *ordinary* of yesterday is not necessarily the *ordinary* of today. As one of the members of the *Valkai* group described to me: "For us it's a process of growth that means people have to find balance both with-in and with-out in order to keep moving". This existential search for balance also challenges the ontological forms of ethnographic writing which place the ordinary of conflict against the extraordinary tactics of survival. This does not imply a denial of the horrors that daily living in a violent setting can bring, or even an acceptance and normalization of them. Instead, it focuses on imagination and possibility, which take on the reality of life and work through it. This also illustrates the importance of recognizing the different ways people can respond to different forms of violence, and the ways in which they simultaneously work in and around everyday lives. Where Rani's daily chores, and tree-planting, for example, were instrumental to carving out a space for the future, they remained restrained and silenced by threat and fear of the kind of violence which rendered public expressions of grief and open resistance impossible. As testimony to the climate of threat and fear in the border villages of Batticaloa, this is made more visible by the contrast of the Tsunami, which did not discriminate against its victims and provided a reason, however tragic, for death and destruction. Although the effects of the Tsunami very quickly became politicized, the initial tragedy, emerging from physical and environmental destructive forces, was seen as apolitical and therefore allowed some kind of closure and space for the public expression of grief to be found.

The everyday lives described in this chapter demonstrate the different kinds of actions that take place within an environment where movements always have to be measured and controlled and decisions evaluated against risk. As such, I have argued that from these narratives, everyday *endurance* emerges and reveals how people deal with their pasts, present and futures. Life is not simply explained through alterations to the ordinary but demands further questions about how the *ordinary* is understood; whether it could hold different meanings and how a frame of reference may stretch according to what type of everyday sets the context. As in the previous chapter, the physical bodily reactions to violence compel us to consider the significance of the body's role in taking on the everyday and moving forward. Therefore rather than looking for what is *said*, the focus is about where you are in the world and how this is revealed through everyday actions such as daily chores, or fishing without fish. In this way, looking beyond the *acceptance* of the everyday and of a banal and mundane *ordinary* we are required to explore the possibility of new contexts for daily life. Moreover, certain moments can provide space and opportunity and be grasped as times at which change may be effected, or at least imagined. Therefore the everyday is not only a matter of reproducing routine and doing the same thing time and time again, but can be about imagination and investment in hope. For the individuals considered in this chapter, embracing the everyday, personally and collectively, means questioning the ordinary through the politics of small gestures, of working with what is available and always trying to do more. As part of this quest, the ways in which people are tied to one another and their networks of connectivity must also be considered, as a part of writing people out of victimhood and as part of the endurance of life.



Figure 17: Returning to sea, Batticaloa fishermen, (January 2005)

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

“Batticaloa is like a cemetery. Everything is dead and broken”. Ranjini said this to me as we sat in the shadowy darkness of another evening of power-cuts in Batticaloa. It was March 2007, and I was back in Sri Lanka after a seven-month break in the UK for my final month of research. As Chapter Five described, this was at a time when the government had stepped up the pace of attacks on the LTTE and begun an intense campaign of shelling and thus ‘clearing’ the LTTE out of the East. What I and others did not know at that time was that this period of fighting marked the beginning of the end of the war between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government. At that time, the power cuts coincided with the rounds of shelling; starting in the early hours of the morning, they would continue intermittently until around midnight. In our household, although the lack of power prevented us from carrying out our usual evening rituals of watching television, working on the computer and reading, there was also something quite different about the intimate and quiet space we found ourselves in. Each evening, in the eerie orange glow of the candles and gas lamps, we would find ourselves talking together; discussing, remembering, imagining and debating in ways we had not done before. Not all of us were there by that time. The gaps left by Krishna and Kamla, both of whom had left Sri Lanka to pursue lives they hoped would offer something different, were painfully felt. Ranjini (one of the other house members) was staying at another house too, reducing the family numbers to four or five. The *Valkai* group was still meeting regularly; however, the number of people who attended had also dwindled with travel and movement being so difficult.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that there were fewer of us and that circumstances were so tense and frightening, the hushed conversations that emerged in the darkness felt intimate and honest. We would share memories, thoughts, and ideas which often led to remembering those who had not survived, and those left behind who were now facing even more danger. Knowing that it was my last month there for a while, I also took this time to ask more questions, attempting to draw together some of the threads of ideas and thoughts that my time in Batticaloa had created while also learning to deal with the immediacy of violence unfolding around us. For all of us, it felt easier to be honest and vulnerable in this particular space; the darkness providing a blanket of protection and allowing more than what normally felt comfortable to be shared. Perhaps also, with the sound of the shells and the sense of fear and uncertainty, our increased awareness of our own mortality, our fragility in the wider setting of physical destruction, meant that we needed to feel connected in that



moment. Nordstrom (1994: 15) notes that '(t)he present has meaning because it is embedded in a matrix of past realities and future possibilities. Our sense of self comes from memories (histories) projected into the (future) horizons of our lives'. In this present moment for us in that household in Batticaloa, the past realities of similar times of violence told us that danger was close, but also that people survive. They also told us that we were relatively safe compared to those in the more exposed areas of the villages. We knew that what were hopeful futures could turn into violent presents and eventually slip back to form memories of violent pasts once again. Yet at the same time, the future remained open and shaped by possibility, for we knew the reality was that people did keep going and did strive for something different. It was not only violent memories that created the self and the future but the constant *endurance* of the everyday that opened up to alternative meanings and imaginings of other every-days.

It is in light of the conversations on those evenings of power-cuts in 2007 that I frame my conclusion to this thesis. What unfolded in those dark, evening spaces reflected what has become the focus of this thesis - the significance of connections and intimacy for revealing how people in Batticaloa deal with violence in their everyday lives. It is also particularly important that in this final chapter I return to the very setting from which the impetus for my thesis evolved. This is not only because the women in the *Valkai* group shaped and guided me through my experiences in the East, but also because it is this particular social location and the intimate interactions between a specific group of people that has provided the frame of reference for this thesis. As I explained at the start, while my work has developed from the kinds of experiences and stories that were extracted from and made possible by these interactions with certain people, at the same time, the particularities of place and people and much of the detail of their work cannot be revealed. As such, the women with whom I lived and worked, and from whom in depth and articulate explanations, stories and imaginations were spun out, have had to be faded into the background of my writing. Instead, I have focused on the stories and the lives of people that can be told. This has evidently made my task much harder and created what in the end can be called an ethnography of process, for it is the processes, the articulation, embodiment and imagination of the social context that has been captured in my work. Meanwhile, as I have written, I have found myself courting the dilemma of how to give credit to a group of people who, in essence, co-authored this work, and yet cannot and most often do not want to make claims to what is produced. While grappling with this issue, I have aimed to produce what can be seen as an ethnography of particular conversations and commentary about everyday life in Batticaloa where the engagement with and endurance of fear and violence both allow and disallow people to speak out. Their 'present absence', however, does not negate the significance of the women

or the *Valkai* group, but rather reflects, and indeed emphasizes, the lived reality of everyday violence in Batticaloa, in which people must find strategies to endure, survive and create hope for the future. By returning to the ideas of the *Valkai* women in the final part of this chapter, I can attempt to tie together the threads of everyday understanding, meanings of the ordinary and hope for the future which have run throughout the thesis, while sharpening a sense of the ideas that shaped the *Valkai* group's work. In doing so, I am also able to reveal the extent to which my understanding of everyday life in Batticaloa has been based upon the lives and visions of these women and what they have to say.

While my family in Batticaloa provided my original source of understanding, by alternating between their particular accounts and other people's lives, I was able to generate many other levels of conversation which highlighted the importance of everyday issues of trust, hope and fear. It is these issues which have emerged as central in this thesis, embedded in the spatial mapping of the everyday. The nature of a context such as Batticaloa and of dwelling upon the lives of individuals with whom the author's own experiences and emotions are woven, is that in reality there is not any kind of conclusion in terms of 'ending' to be reached. Just as experiences, lives (and deaths) go on in this context, so do attempts to make sense of their shape and meaning. Therefore, my intention for this conclusion is not necessarily to tie each chapter neatly together with final answers and summaries, but rather to draw on some of the prominent themes that have emerged in this thesis and consider the kinds of questions we are left with. The main theme that I focus on is grief, which has emerged from the many stories of suffering and loss that weave together private and public meanings and the life histories of Batticaloa and its people. From grief, I also return to the themes of fear, risk, trust and hope which have been plaited through both existential and political meanings and experiences in everyday life. Drawing upon Butler's (2004) premise of the power of grief and mourning in revealing shared vulnerability, and thus the ties that can bind us as human beings, I argue that there are different ways of experiencing and acting upon the past, present and future which do not have to be about violence and suffering but instead reveal a world of possibility and fragile hope. I argue that the role of the *Valkai* group, in particular, is central to striving for recognition and change of space (rather than themselves), which also challenges a sense of the self and other. I also suggest that the significance placed upon achieving a balance which locates suffering *within* resistance, rather than in opposition to it, could play an important part in models of healing which have generally been structured around ideas of grief as a debilitating and unproductive.

Ideas of space, trust, fear and hope are all themes which have come to characterise contexts of violence and suffering and pepper the stories and narratives of everyday lives in the North

and East of Sri Lanka. Yet it is in the spaces where they take on meaning and are embodied that we need to look in order to develop a deeper understanding. In this conclusion, I suggest that through narrating the lives of people in Batticaloa, these themes can be brought alive through a deeper understanding and hopefully contribute to recognition of the ways in which violence is understood and incorporated into the ‘ordinary’ of everyday life in Batticaloa. Moreover, they illustrate the need to remain aware of shifting contexts, changing boundaries and alternative meanings even where forms of activism and conscious resistance are less visible and do not fit into specific categories. As such, I relate these ideas to the broader concepts of grief, healing, and peace and suggest this could lead to a contribution for a new perspective on war and peace. This is one which does not divide the world into victims and perpetrators, nor concentrates only the horror and suffering, nor presents the ethnographer as heroine – instead, it seeks to bring out the quiet negotiation and shaping of spaces which are encompassed in the endurance of the everyday.



Figure18: Graffiti on well, Batticaloa (2005)

## 7.1 Spaces of Mourning and of Meaning

### The bare facts of the everyday

When Ranjini made her comment about Batticaloa being “dead”, it was hard not to pick up on her sense of hopelessness and despair. Violence was escalating around us and there did not seem to be anything tangible through which hope could be ascertained and nurtured. This reminded me about how I had felt when Rani had commented, after the death of her husband, “Now we need another tree”. Rani’s deflation and despair reflected her experiences of loss and loss again, and in light of this and the reality of continuing violence, her hopelessness was understandable. Like the rest of the people I lived with, each time a killing happened or a mine exploded, we found our consciences clouded with questions; how would

people manage to cope with so much loss? How many more trees would we have to plant? How much violence could people in Eastern Sri Lanka take? These questions corresponded to the bare facts of life in Batticaloa: these were facts of abductions, arrests, of disappearances and of families suffering repeated displacement, with consequent deprivation and poverty. These were facts of war widows, of large numbers of children being abducted by Tamil militants while other children joined through despair or revenge; of high levels of unemployment coupled with depression, alcoholism and domestic violence. These facts could not be ignored or escaped and they are evident throughout the stories and lives represented in this thesis. However, as particular experiences and learning took shape throughout my research, I was assailed by the sense that these were not necessarily the most helpful questions to be asked. While they were questions that could not be avoided and were probably asked by the majority of individuals at some point during their lives in Batticaloa, they were also ones which moved away from focussing on dealing with what was happening in the present and the strategies that did and did not work at that time. Instead, they sought to make sense of a situation by categorising and labelling lives and futures in terms of victims, suffering, survival, and agency.

Questions of everyday life have remained central to understanding lives in contexts of conflict and violence. I have shown from the beginning of this thesis that answers have mostly taken the form of accounts which highlight the extent of brute force and subsequent suffering or of the 'normalisation' of violence which has led to 'extraordinary' acts of survival and resistance. The window through which the lives of 'ordinary' people in such climates have been framed has often been the extent of totalized violence through tactics of dirty war and the spaces of 'empowerment' that people, particularly women, have entered as a result of the changes wrought by conflict (see Nordstrom 1997, 2002; Green 1999; Rajasingham-Senenayake 2004a). This has added weight to questions of peace and development, which are intrinsically linked to understanding everyday violence, and gain value by arguing for transformation of 'civil society' and proposing humanitarian projects to enhance aspects of daily life for civilians (see Orjuela 2005; Goodhand & Lewer 1999). While these answers are no doubt important for understanding the experiences and meaning of everyday lives, they remain incomplete. Treating violence as a continuum (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2003: 1) and viewing everyday life through the dichotomy of struggle and survival creates too vague and all-encompassing a conceptualization of everyday violence which fails to recognize aspects of life which do not fall into the accepted paradigm. It fails to look for what else goes on, other than immediate violence: what happens beyond the more obvious spaces of violence, how fear and risk are internalised and worked with, and, crucially the aspects of everyday life that are *not* about violence. This is

something to which I have drawn attention throughout this thesis; the common binaries of suffering and resilience that frame the lives of those coping with violence as a daily reality; the ways in which violence is filtered through as an ‘ordinary’ experience pitted against the extraordinary acts of resistance and survival to overcome the everyday (see Nordstrom 1997; Green 1999; Scheper-Hughes 2008). This framework, I have suggested, separates out experiences of those who manage and those who do not, ignoring the reality that people’s lives straddle both; they suffer and they survive, they give up and they resist. It is in the texture of this process of straddling that I have argued we can find the *endurance* of the everyday in which people also find spaces to push for different experiences and challenge the meaning of what is ordinary and everyday.

The stories and memories that emerge vividly from the tangle of violence and the everyday involve the inter-connections of lives, deaths, bodies, pasts, presents, and futures. This is within a context of continued violence, ongoing suffering and the devastation of physical, social and imagined landscapes. The war and the Tsunami have done their part to carve up the spaces of Eastern Sri Lanka to the extent that no one is free from the effects of everyday violence, while choices about the future have been narrowed by the heightened risk of loss. The struggle then resides in the ways that people devise everyday strategies to negotiate and work around the constraints and minimise the risks. It is in the tension between what is accepted and what is not, between knowing and not knowing, and in the entanglements of the everyday and fear that we can begin to understand what the everyday means and how it works. In Meena’s account of her experiences growing up in the East, it is the overlapping flows of family, community, and militancy which constitute her endurance through the years of loss and her ability to find spaces to push forward, and forge connections. The experiences of Rani and mothers connected by the *Valkai* group, also revealed the everyday reality of the suffocating intimacy of violence, fear, and silence. Where words are not spoken, familiarity and knowledge shape understanding and pain, and where bodies are dumped and buried in unmarked graves, it is the very real, raw awareness of what is happening and being held back, that shapes life. Furthermore, Rani’s engagement with the tree planted in remembrance of her son tightens the ties that bind, while marking out small and fragile steps forward that can take on new meanings and new futures. The fishermen, also operated collectively as a group, tied by their environment and emotions; what was not always articulated in words was revealed by actions and routine. This was routine that appeared empty on the surface, and yet was crowded with meaning and courage – *endurance*. Even my own experiences, as a researcher and as a young, independent woman attempting to live out a new kind of life in a visibly frightening, emotionally engaging and challenging environment were defined and shaped by the connections that worked and those

that did not. It is the systems of interaction unfolding across people's lives that suggest that although violence shapes lives, it does not have to be 'a determining fact in shaping reality as people will know it, in the future' (Nordstrom 2004: 15). These systems of interaction were tested and challenged by the effects of violence and revealed that the production of fear and violence, like other mechanisms of control, while powerful, is never absolute.

### **Everyday violence and everyday futures**

The chapters in this thesis reveal that the pervasiveness of violence - actual, imagined and anticipated - creates physical, mental, and emotional spaces of fear, threat, and silence which isolate and break down connections of kinship and trust in order to ensure control. Simultaneously, the complex and shifting lines of demarcation and the confusing struggle to claim spaces mean that control is always partial, fragile and subject to change and renegotiation. As much as control is partial, so is the ability to break connections and prevent people from strategizing and finding ways to keep family, networks and futures going. By mapping out spaces and exploring the developed tactics of managing the everyday, people work with what is in place in order to manage their everyday experiences and minimize risk.

A sense of space is plotted through landmarks, through stories and through local and personal chronologies mapped onto the 'official' history. Lisa Weeden (1999) describes how the power of an authoritarian regime is multiplied and diffused through people's everyday habits of conformity and the meanings they attach to them. The forms of transgression, she argues, always have the potential for political possibilities (ibid). If we focus on the strategies employed in the everyday, it is possible to grasp the significance of actions which either attempt to passively work with the boundaries that have been set, or actively push at spaces in order to open them up and challenge the lines of control. The desire to keep going, as we have witnessed throughout the stories in this thesis, means that gaps and tears in the system of control can be taken advantage of. Meanwhile, those who are in relatively safer positions can operate as conduits to connect with those facing immediate danger and can push at boundaries to instigate change.

It is also these attempts to push for change that have directed my search for alternative meanings of the everyday and an understanding of how the 'ordinary' might be perceived beyond what is banal and routine. My contention has been that while violent acts may embody complex aspects of meaning that relate to both order and disorder, continuity and rupture in a given context, there is something more than just violence that causes us to question this understanding. As I have demonstrated, this should come from looking at what

is done and feels possible within a certain context, as well as what is not done and what is not said. I argue that it is through the ways that people narrate or embody emotional spaces, and in particular how loss is translated and dealt with, that this can be understood. It is in the spaces of loss and grieving, the experiences which no family in the East has escaped, that the power of violence and vulnerability has highlighted the strength of connections which work through and against structures of control and constraint to endure the everyday. These actions, I have suggested, are less visible than the other forms of everyday activism and conscious resistance for the very reason that they seek not to be separated from 'active living' that draws on the past and present of continuous pain and loss but also on hope and investing in a different sense of everyday and of the ordinary. It is these, I have argued, that have been missing from any wider understanding of life in Eastern Sri Lanka and, more generally, of how life goes on through everyday conflict. Moreover they provide a marker of how things *could be*.

### **The Value of (lost) lives and grieving**

But perhaps there is some other way to live such that one becomes neither affectively dead nor mimetically violent, a way out of the circle of violence altogether. This possibility has to do with demanding a world in which bodily vulnerability is protected without therefore being eradicated and with insisting on the line that must be walked between the two (Butler 2004: 42).

In *Precarious Lives*, Judith Butler (2004) proposes that processes of grieving and mourning are capable of making apparent more interdependency and vulnerability. In mourning we become fractured and dislocated, she argues; that is, we lose something which is a part of ourselves, and is also part of another. This, in turn, makes us mysterious or enigmatic to ourselves and causes us to question our very existence, past, present and future, as rendered different by such loss (McRobbie 2006: 78). Engaging with matters of life and death, with burial, grief, and mourning, Butler argues that our proclamation of loss comprises a mode of address to others wherein we reveal our vulnerability. Butler offers her ideas in a critical analysis of the post 9/11 appropriation of grief by the US to justify and legitimize policies to wage war against the 'other'. Through enduring such loss, we initiate a new circuit of communication with others as well as marking loss and opportunity. Therefore, rather than understanding mourning through ideas of isolation, withdrawal and suffering as is commonly done, it can instead provide a basis for new forms of political community through our exposed vulnerability and dependency on one another. This idea of using our dependency on others, and mobilising bodily vulnerability as a means of transcending fear and forging connections with others resonates with what we have witnessed through the ties between the

*Valkai* group and many of the mothers (and fathers) across the East including Rani, Meena and the fishermen. While Butler takes the example of families in the USA and Britain grieving for those killed in the 9/11 tragedy and fighting in Iraq, we could also look to the mothers and families in Batticaloa for evidence of how grief can be mobilized, though perhaps in more subtle and fragile ways. Analysing Butler's contribution to an understanding of state and social systems, McRobbie frames Butler's ideas on mourning by asking, 'How might that moment of recognition of vulnerability become an opportunity to consider those others for whom such palpable and routine vulnerability is a normative condition of existence?' (2006: 79). According to Butler (ibid), it is the very ties and connections that render us dependent and a part of others which can be understood as a 'condition of our constant humanity' and which can become productive in creating new forms of connectability and sociability.

If we place this understanding within the shape and frame of Batticaloa's everyday experiences as explored in this thesis, we can see this in terms of the re-opening of spaces of vulnerability and inter-dependency against the destructive powers of control and manipulation which seek to isolate and shut such spaces down. As many stories have revealed, loss, suffering, death and destruction have become an inevitable part of Batticaloa's physical and social landscapes which shape everyday experiences and the meanings attributed to them. However, I have argued and demonstrated that dwelling in those everyday spaces, and questioning what it is to live in and around violence, illustrates that any understanding of life in Batticaloa must encompass not only violence but also the 'everything else' of everyday life, including the ability to carry on and to invest in the future. Factors such as silence, trust, fear and risk reveal themselves as strategies by which people negotiate the everyday while searching for cracks and crevices in everyday spaces to instigate and encourage change. Central to this are the connections and ties through which people relate to one another and build up networks to transcend the context of violence and isolation. Butler's contention is that to look beyond the possibility of war and consider a 'meaningful peace' is to renew our understanding of injury and what it means to grieve. The significance of this is that Butler is also focusing upon the connections between people and questioning the most basic human obligations to one another in order to illustrate human interdependence. At the heart of this interdependence, argues Butler, (2004: 43) are human vulnerability, and our general state of fragility. Increased attunement to this provides the opportunity to make us 'more humane' and to recognise our moral responsibilities to one another.



## Silence that heals

Butler (2004) argues that the importance of focusing on grief is that it unsettles the common understanding of mourning as a debilitating and unproductive process. Human reactions to the pain of loss and grief are often to seek to close grief, refuse it, and even to anaesthetize it in order to carry on. This, Butler contends, becomes a part of the cycle of violence as revenge, for in denying grief and pain, relations of vulnerability are transformed into relations of power through which the violence continues. However, 'doing nothing' as Butler (2004) proposes, although seemingly counter-productive, can break the cycle of revenge and provide what Butler suggests is 'a fertile kind of action' (ibid: 53). The emphasis is on the word *action* here because 'doing nothing' is not a case of literally sitting back and remaining detached, but instead refers more to 'doing nothing' to aggravate further violence and prevent processes of healing from taking place. We can relate this to the work of the *Valkai* group and the processes of creating connections through loss, planting trees in remembrance and to symbolize new meanings, and seeking to keep spaces open in order to envisage alternative every day lives. Similar to Butler's ideas, the strategies of the *Valkai* group are to dwell in the spaces of vulnerability and loss, which in turn allow the process of grieving to take place in new, unsettled spaces which challenges the violent structure in place by 'doing nothing'. Moreover, the mothers, in refusing to accept their situations of despair and forced hopelessness, do not seek to close grief and move on, but instead draw upon their shared vulnerability to challenge those who take their children and try to close spaces.

The apparent urgency and need to foreclose grief and move into action can be located in medical models shaped by Western discourse which have sought to brand experiences of violence and loss as 'trauma' and often draw attention to an apparent failure of local mental health support groups to alleviate emotional incapacity to face loss. Although not entirely fixed across space and time, a global therapeutic approach has emerged with a shared central emphasis on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Clancy & Hamber 2008). These methods build on the notion of trauma understood as 'the destruction of the individual and/or collective structures' via a traumatic situation, which in turn is defined as 'an event or several events of extreme violence that occur within a social context' (Becker 1995: 3). Although the latter does not always produce trauma, it describes the type of dirty war/intimate war contexts found in places such as Sri Lanka, in which successive and cumulative injuries affect individuals and communities.

The assumption based on the diagnostic approach of PTSD is that what needs to be 'healed' is the multitude of individual, political, social and cultural responses to a traumatic situation

and its aftermath (Clancey & Hamber 2008: 9). However, given that political trauma (trauma related to ‘complex political emergencies’ and ‘dirty war’) is not only a health problem but also as a socio-political problem, the approach which is heavily reliant upon Western notions of mental health and the individual in non-Western settings has faced increasing criticism over the past decade. Attempts to intervene have often been associated with NGO-orientated efforts of ‘peace-building’ and sustainable development in societies affected by political violence. Although it is not my intention to provide a detailed analysis, it is important to highlight that academics and practitioners alike have questioned the utility of the diagnostic tool and suggested that the number of those suffering from PTSD is overestimated.<sup>104</sup> Wessells (2006) for example, points out that in Angolan society individuals have a range of terms for mental illness and distress, but none of which correspond to Western conceptualizations of PTSD. Therefore the imposition of ‘category fallacy’ (Kleinman 1977) is not only problematic from a scientific perspective, but can present ethical, moral and practical dilemmas by silencing local people’s understanding of distress (Wessells 2006).

That the rigid definition of PTSD does not fit comfortably with environments where violence is ongoing and trauma can be experienced in layers relating to different experiences at different times can be related back to my discussion in Chapters Five and Six regarding the ‘remaking’ of everyday life following violence. As noted, one of the main differences between the Batticaloa context and contexts from which Veena Das (2007) drew her ideas of the everyday and the ordinary, is that Batticaloa’s everyday violence has not as yet seen an ending or experienced calm. As such, the everyday is not remade but lived through; daily life is endured as a balancing act of what it is to be ordinary and what this means for the future.

The question of silence and the absence of words to talk about difficult experiences are important factors here. While trauma’s ‘unspeakable’ and ‘amorphous’ dimensions (Ross 2003) can be identified in silence, silence should not necessarily be viewed only as a legacy of terror but instead as an intimate and embodied strategy of keeping up routine while simultaneously questioning meaning. The experiences of Rani, in particular, illustrate this through her engagement with her daily chores and the watering of her son’s tree “*kuti annar maram*”. As such, a space of the banal and the ordinary could be imagined as a place for optimism and resistance within the everyday experiences and the moral economy of war. Rani’s experiences could no doubt be cast as traumatic and causing existential crisis and suffering for Rani as an individual and in relation to her family. However, the individualistic and positivistic approach of trauma-models for ‘healing’ do not always account for the

---

<sup>104</sup> For further discussion see Young (1995); Robben & Suárez-Orozco (2000) and specific to Sri Lanka see Ramanathapillai (2006) and Somasundaram (2007).

intimate knitting of social and structural violence with issues of context, morality, and subjective and social meanings (Hamber 2006; Lykes & Mersky, 2006). Nor do the underpinnings of PTSD always recognize silence as a valuable resource, which is not always a characteristic of terror and loss, but also manifest in forms of *engagement* with everyday life. As I have demonstrated, silence can illustrate the way in which people in the most vulnerable spaces work out what can and cannot be done and find gaps for pushing change. Tree planting, for example, represents silence as a positive resource and presence. This is a presence that does not need to be marked with words, for the knowing, the feeling and the sharing seem to be enough in that fragile and unfamiliar space. Therefore, if we combine Butler's notion of the power of grief with what we have seen in the role played by people in Eastern Sri Lanka, particularly the mothers and the *Valkai* group, then we can argue that the space created by shared loss and grief, illustrates a different sense of 'getting on' in uncertain times.

### **Grief as resilience**

In this thesis I argue that the mapping of subjective experience of loss is appropriate to revealing local and individual meanings attached to distress and grief. However, this is not to suggest that people experiencing violence in their everyday lives do not need or would not benefit from some kinds of intervention and support. I emphasize this point because, as I have already illustrated, the binary opposite to focusing on suffering is focusing on resilience. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2008: 25) describes it as 'the sources of strength, toughness, hardiness, and relative immunity from personal and psychological collapse that we have come to associate with exposure to a variety of human calamities'. Scheper-Hughes uses this idea of resilience to highlight the limitations of the dominant psychological trauma model, and to argue for a rethinking of the notions of trauma, violence, and expectation. She refers back to examples in her book, *Death Without Weeping* (1993), which offer an account of everyday life in the Brazilian slum of Alto do Cruzeiro. Here, she suggests, mothers had to develop a 'high expectancy' of the death of their infants and thus pre-select babies to die after birth. Thus, she argues, '[t]he experience of too much loss, too much death where new life should be led to a kind of patient resignation...that obliterated outrage as well as sorrow' (2008: 29). My contention is that the suggestion that sorrow is 'obliterated' seems to be as much of a generalized claim as that which suggests all mothers are traumatized. However, the experiences of mothers in Batticaloa that have been explored in this thesis, and the lives of those who have lost numerous times and face a future of more uncertainty and vulnerability, suggest that sorrow and grief is complicit in their resilience. As such, resilience would not imply 'immunity' but conversely sensitivity to loss and awareness of

vulnerability. As Butler argues, we need to recognize the humanity of the ‘other’ in terms of their vulnerability and loss, but also in terms of their courage and strength to move forward and find strategies for working with what is at hand.

In another example, Scheper-Hughes (2008) draws upon the experiences of young African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC) militants to argue that rather than seeing themselves as ‘victims’ of violence, they claim to be ‘victors’. Referring to resilience displayed in the slums of Brazil and the townships of South Africa, Scheper-Hughes proposes that strength of character and ‘relative invulnerability’ are purchased at the price of relationships, of intimacy and ‘all those emotions and dispositions that render humans vulnerable to pain, to loss, to grief, to despair and to hopelessness’ (2008: 43). This suggests that although Scheper-Hughes claims to recognise human nature as ‘both resilient *and* frail’ (2008: 42 emphasis in original) and that this ‘should not be viewed as an either/or opposition’, her proposition of ‘resilience in the face of adversity’ prevents a consideration of grief, pain and trauma as an *integral part* of everyday resistance. This proposition allows Scheper-Hughes to argue that ‘[t]he PTSD model underestimates the human capacity not only to survive, but to thrive, during and following states of emergency, extreme adversity, and everyday as well as extraordinary violence’ (ibid: 42).

However, in light of the stories of suffering and loss revealed in this thesis, I have argued that we should not oppose all methods for working with models of trauma and intervention, but instead consider how to strengthen the strategies already in place to open up and maintain spaces where relations of trust can develop. Key to this, I suggest, is changing the ways in which we understand human experiences of violence and moving away from concepts of resilience which deny suffering and grief, and instead focusing on everyday endurance. It also means reassessing how the PTSD model is framed and utilized, for although in theory it makes universal assumptions, this does not mean that in practice it is not malleable to more culturally-specific ideas. Indeed, it is far less helpful to return to tired oppositions of Western versus non-Western when the permeation of boundaries between countries, cultures, and communities is clear. Moreover, in countries such as Sri Lanka, although there has been an inevitable escalation of mental-health agencies and practitioners from ‘outside’, psychiatry has also been widely practiced amongst Sri Lankan people themselves. Somasundaram, an international psychiatrist (1998) reveals, for example the important role that psychiatry played in Northern Sri Lanka throughout the 1980s and 1990s. As a lecturer and practitioner of psychiatry in Jaffna, and also one of the co-founders of the University Teachers of Human Rights at Jaffna University, Somasundaram experienced and witnessed the effects of violence throughout the conflict and therefore was able to provide an

‘insiders’ perspective. As another example, one of the women that I lived with in Batticaloa had been part of an organisation founded in the 1990s to provide trauma support for a group of Tamil men who had been tortured in army custody. Working collaboratively with local counsellors and international psychiatrist, the organization held regular group meetings in which personal experiences were shared and mechanisms of understanding and support established among all involved. Somasundaram supports this view by noting that although narrow medical models are inadequate to fully understand the processes of suffering and loss in Sri Lanka, mobilizing PTSD diagnoses is ‘an internationally recognized means to draw attention to the plight of civilians and in the long term create social awareness and mobilize support for affected populations’ (1988: 169). In contrast to Scheper-Hughes, he suggests that ‘descriptive narratives of psychological reactions...transcribed in the language of the mind and body’ provide what conventional accounts of war fail to do – a testimony to suffering (ibid). Therefore, rather than taking Young’s (1995) notion of the ‘traumatic vision’ of PTSD medicalising powerful human experiences and assuming a helpless, passive self (Scheper Hughes 2008: 39) we can consider ways in which the ideas of PTSD can map onto local ideas of endurance and violence to create a functional support system. This is a system that does not underestimate survival yet does not overestimate resilience to the extent that the need to grieve is forgotten.

## **7.2 Ties of Relations and Shaping Peace**

### **Gendered bodies and (un)gendered meanings**

As we become aware of a general state of fragility and physical vulnerability that bodies are connected across, it is impossible not to recognize gender as a factor which highlights both how we are made by meaning which precedes us and also how we give meaning to individual lives and communities. The stories and ideas in this thesis also highlight the elective gender practices upon which a major part of the struggle against violence and militarization is contingent. At the beginning of this thesis, I argued that although most of my informants were women and their perspectives shaped the vast majority of my experiences in Sri Lanka, at the same time I found it less useful to focus on women exclusively. I highlighted the fact that although men’s voices are less salient in the stories and narratives that I tell, men remained intricately connected to every life, space and place described. However, as this thesis has developed, and as I have examined power relations and the contradictions and injustices inherent in everyday life in Batticaloa, gender and gender relations have clearly emerged as prominent themes. Moreover, as I have challenged the view of focusing on victims and heroes in warsapes, the role of women has emerged as central in that they are most often depicted by this binary and thus their initiatives to endure

the everyday become simplified and fixed. This has invariably led me to consider the role of particular women in Eastern Sri Lanka, especially those connected with the *Valkai* group, and their part in challenging destructive powers in Batticaloa. As I have shown, many observers have stressed that there is an essential link between women, motherhood and non-violence, arguing that those engaged in mothering work have distinct motives for rejecting war which are contingent upon their ability to resolve conflict non-violently. While it is true that in comparison with men far fewer women take up arms, and that internal movements for peace are frequently led by women, it is also true that we need to look at the reasons why women are more visible in this case and the dynamics of a particular situation.

Throughout, I have remained wary of fixing women within a particular role and have suggested, for example, that the mothers and widows in the *Valkai* group were less concerned with consciously using their status as vulnerable women than simply working with what they could at a particular time. In Batticaloa, this equaled with their role as mothers, who were more able to move about and avoid risk than men. In this sense men were more the victims as they were often forced to stay in the shadows and avoid active participation in seeking their children, for example, even when they wanted to. In practice, men were and are always a part of this struggle, and many are themselves involved in efforts to challenge violence and push for change, but in different ways. This resonates with Butler's (2004: 48) argument that distinctive categories can actually deny the actual complexity of lives in question by seeking to provide single models of reason and notions of the subject. The mothers and *Valkai* women reflect what Butler refers to as the 'array of sometimes incommensurable epistemological and political beliefs and modes and means of agency' (ibid) that shape the paths of activism or, as I have called it *active living*. This framework is important precisely for the reason that it does not fix categories or spaces and departs from notions of revenge and repetition of violence. In this sense, gender has revealed the possibilities of subjectivity and agency – of being gendered differently and of differently viewing gender. As Butler (2004) suggests, we are constrained by certain kinds of cultural forces but not determined by them, and therefore open to improvisation and malleability. Therefore while there *is* a gendered story at play (as much as there is a violent story at play), I do not reduce it simply to being one of men or women, violence or peace, since all are dependent upon one another in order to see a way forward. Bourke (2007: 33) argues, 'there is always a very particular story to tell about violence, specific to its own time and place, including the ambiguities of its gendered dynamics' and it is this focus that allows me to bring the argument back to the importance of human bodies – men and women - as fundamentally dependent and vulnerable.

Drawing on the feminist legacy of ideas about intimacy, domesticity and maternity, Butler reflects on the immediacy with which some deaths are articulated, made visible and mourned (since we appear to seek comfort in what is familiar which creates a bond with others) and those that we do not/cannot mourn, and are therefore rendered invisible and dispensable. Butler's reflection is a critical comment upon the various modalities of power and the tragic repercussions for those unequivocally outside the frames of contemporary, global modalities, whose lives ironically define the terms within which political culture is currently conducted. Therefore Butler forces the critical questioning as to 'whose death is mournable and whose is not' (McRobbie 2006: 79). This kind of question has also emerged in relation to the many lives (and deaths) described in this thesis that have testified to the ability of the state to control the experiences and expendability of people in Eastern Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the forced inability of the families of those killed or disappeared to find space to properly grieve, and often even bury the body of those they love, grates against the visibility of public ceremonies of mourning held by the LTTE and by the state. For Butler (2004), it is the thousands of Iraqi and Palestinian lives lost which remain unknown and unmarked that reveals the manifestation of the management of populations and bodies, disciplinary and discursive, in the strategies of American state power. She draws upon Foucault to identify the diverse technologies and normalising practices as conducted through language and in the convergence and repetition of statements, pronouncements and iteration, through which behaviour becomes known, thinkable, recognizable and legitimated. Thus, state power circumscribes the capacity of the subject to contest the terms upon which his/her existence is based and limits the space for resistance.

The significance of the contagious mobilization of a vocabulary of fear (or risk) as a political instrument, and the effect of foreclosure that this can so easily achieve, reveals how state power is dispersed beyond a central command, instead taking on bodily and spatial characteristics. It is thus embodied, corporeal and bio-political. However, as much as this kind of framework is needed to induce questioning of state powers and the loss of 'other' lives, there is also need for a more nuanced understanding of how this can productively play out in places where fear, secrecy, threat and violence continue; where mourning is circumscribed and can only take place in private, hidden spaces. Rather than argue for the visibility of deaths and space for mourning, which in the context of Batticaloa would put those involved at greater risk, we need a different way to draw on mourning as a personal factor for establishing balance and endurance. There is a need to recognize uncertainty and unpredictability as common factors in finding a sensitive and careful political instrument for pushing wider spaces of connection and support. Furthermore, Butler's argument is mapped out by distance – that is, that the 'other' that we must respond to and recognize moral

responsibility for is located in Iraq and Afghanistan, whereas the ‘self’ is the Western-shaped self. However, if we are to seek value in this argument for Batticaloa and Sri Lanka more generally, then it is also important to consider how we locate notions of political responsibility in ties of relations that are almost too close for comfort. In Batticaloa, the problem with distance, therefore, is not physical, but lies in the rendering of what is familiar and trustworthy as frightening, suspicious, and unknown. Distance lies between those different players who claim spaces and seek to control and manipulate lives and those who are rendered vulnerable as they negotiate and attempt to transcend these spaces. Moreover, the overall context of fear and risk means that ties of relations are constantly stretched and tested, worn and broken. Therefore it is the question of how these ties can be strengthened that I have addressed by analyzing the work of Meena, Rani, the *Valkai* group and others who have demonstrated a commitment to living with a certain kind of vulnerability and susceptibility which simultaneously enhances risk while investing in trust and hope.

## **7.3 Vocabulary and Vision: It’s a matter of language**

### **Peace-building or building peace?**

One of the most important questions that has arisen from discussions about violence and vulnerability throughout this thesis is where it leaves those who are daily exposed to risk and unable to escape climates of everyday conflict; what this means for their sense of the future; and how we can accommodate different meanings and bring into political discussion a different vocabulary and vision for everyday lives in violence. Such visions are invariably linked to concepts of development and ‘peace-building’ in contexts of conflict and civil war, and the possibility of ending war and of finding a meaningful peace. These are clearly pertinent questions, given the situation in Sri Lanka as I finish writing this thesis. Today, the LTTE has been defeated and the government has declared a victory, which if considered sensitively and carefully could offer an opportunity for a new chapter in Sri Lanka. However, all evidence since the war was officially declared over on May 19<sup>th</sup> 2009, tragically points to further betrayal of the people, with little recognition of dignity and rights for those shut up in IDP camps in the North, and an intensifying of the use state of machinery for a narrow political agenda and to further undermine democratic institutions (see UTHR 2009).<sup>105</sup> However, the victory against the LTTE could be a victory against repression and violence if the state were to seek a political transformation that listened to the need for open political, everyday spaces, that acknowledged the enormous loss of life, and embraced ‘doing nothing’ as a path to peace.

---

<sup>105</sup> See UTHR (2009) for further discussion on the current moves of the Sri Lankan state *vis a vis* the people locked up in internment camps and the need to find alternative spaces for peace.



Tamils have been worn down by decades of war, and meeting the need for political space to draw on the threads of hope and trust that remain is essential to ensure a future that is different from the cycles of violence that haunted the past. Clearly, the legacy of state violence and violence from the LTTE and other Tamil militant groups cannot be forgotten. It is also too early to turn to ideas of forgiveness and reconciliation when wounds remain open and sore, and so many families and communities await the opportunity to begin stitching back together their everyday lives. The propensity of the past to exacerbate hatred and fear is critical and carries with it the weight of unfinished histories and voices that are yet to be heard. However, as I have argued in this conclusion, there is another way which can open up spaces for grieving and vulnerability without exacerbating fear and hostility to generate more violence.

Committed to addressing the underlying causes of conflict through both structural and relational transformation, 'peace-building' deals with both the immediate impact of conflict and with attempts to establish peace and prevent violence from continuing, or re-emerging (Hamber & Kelly 2005). I do not intend to explore in depth the fundamental strategies of peacebuilding; however, this could present an area of possible further research, which could build upon the practice of peace-building (in the past and present) in relation to the issues raised in this thesis. What I want to highlight here, though, is the general gap between policy and practice and what this could mean in relation to the ideas of vulnerability, grief and silence as resources for engendering communities of trust, support and ultimately peace. Somasundaram's discussion of the psychological causes and effects of continuous violence in Northern Sri Lanka is framed by his impassioned advocacy of nonviolence as the most effective way for securing political futures and justice. As a powerful critique of violence, therefore, Somasundaram's work reveals a commitment to working to overcome the effects of fear and threat in order to develop an acute awareness of the 'unconscious psychic forces within us' and changing their direction by 'an act of will' (1988: 331). In a similar way, Butler (2004) contends that it is precisely our 'shared helplessness', which is as evident in the susceptibility of our desires and attachments to rejection and loss as in our enduring physical fragility, that ties us together as human beings. She argues that a core part of any explanatory framework for global suffering must be an understanding of shared vulnerability, 'a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot pre-empt'. Mindfulness of this vulnerability, Butler argues, can become the 'basis of claims for non-military political solutions'. Furthermore, she states,

[w]e cannot, however, will away this vulnerability. We must attend to it, even abide by it, as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporal vulnerability from our own brief and devastating exposure to this condition (Butler 2004: 29).

Therefore the importance of attending to vulnerability in this context is that it not only highlights the role of moral responsibilities, but also considers where this can take us and what this means for political futures. As Butler again notes, ‘to ask for recognition or to offer it is not to ask for recognition of what already is. It is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the other’ (ibid: 46). Invoking the power of language to reflect ‘with humility’ on the suffering of others, therefore, can allow the consideration of an ethical vocabulary, which might provide terms for opposing everyday cultures. This is in contrast to stances of refusal which, argues Butler, can lead to notions of resistance and heroism – as revealed by the position offered by Scheper-Hughes (2004), which can be seen to equate resilience with ‘hardiness’ and valour.

This focus can be also be related to the wider context of war and peace in Sri Lanka, in which the experiences and meanings of everyday life could inform and shape ideas of sustainable peace following violence. Lorna McGregor’s (2006) research into elitism within the peace process in Sri Lanka, for example, highlights the ways in which people and their everyday survival skills and strategies are not taken into account during the course of high-level talks and negotiations. McGregor examines the peace process in Sri Lanka as a case study to demonstrate the impact of hegemonic peace talks structured bilaterally by two main parties in the overall project of peace. Although many changes have been effected in Sri Lanka since 2006, including the dissolution of the ceasefire, return to war and ultimate finishing of the war by the government claiming victory over the Tamil Tigers, McGregor’s insights remain pertinent. The declaration of war as ‘officially’ over does not mean an end to the instability and violence in the North and East, and for those who have lived through decades of conflict already, very little has changed as yet. Therefore, the state of no-war/no-peace that McGregor describes remains in place. Noting that the reality of peace negotiations is that they are usually dominated by main contending parties, who can exclude or ignore broader, cross-cutting interests in society, (such as Sri Lankan Muslims), McGregor questions the meaning of sustainable peace and whether it can be constructed without recognizing the agency of ordinary citizens caught up in the conflict (ibid: 39).

## **Remapping peace**

McGregor highlights the ways in which the language of peace during the ceasefire of 2002 was manipulated by the power of the main players in the conflict to create a narrow, bilateral process that allayed fears of a more participatory process. Such fears reflected the concern of the government to appease Southern polity, while for the LTTE it meant maintaining their authority in the North and East. As such, transparency and the cross-cutting issues of identity, community and human rights were relegated to minimal importance in the 'hegemonic conflict discourse' (Liyanage 2003: 6). McGregor (2006: 47) notes that as a result 'the structure and isolation of the peace process which lacks any sequencing both holds them (communities in Sri Lanka) in a state of negative peace and opens the space for human rights abuse to occur in particular areas'. This is a comment that could equally apply to the current situation in Sri Lanka, albeit without any form of peace negotiations, as only one dominant actor remains in power. McGregor highlights, in particular, one of the most significant and predictable consequences of the lack of accountability and lack of recognition of the 'micro-level' as the continuance of human rights violations. This is an issue that has been apparent throughout the experiences described in this thesis and is easily recognized in the everyday lives of people in Tamil-speaking areas as well as other areas in Sri Lanka. McGregor's focus therefore links with the attention applied by Somasundaram and by Butler to human vulnerability in everyday living, and the need for a different vision and vocabulary that speaks not of more violence but of alternative solutions. Kadirgamar (2003) depicts the political context in Sri Lanka as the 'violence of peace' based on the totality of direct and structural violations; a culture of impunity and the militarization of society. Kadirgamar also argued that there had been the creation of three progressive nationalisms within the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities as a direct response to the repression of the former and the promotion of ethnic 'otherness' (McGregor 2006: 50). As well as questioning what the actual meaning of peace can therefore be when it is coupled with notions of violence and violations, we also need to consider how the meaning of peace can be transformed and the spaces in which this can be done.

We need to question where the boundaries of politics lie and, moreover, how we focus on politics in an environment where those who feel the most pernicious effects of violence are assumed to be on the 'margins'. Of the 2002 peace talks, McGregor argues that a recognition of the lack of representation foregrounds two main issues. First, that human rights violations can no longer be subordinated to the overall objective of peace, and second, that broader participation to accommodate the multiple actors and interests at all levels must be ensured (2006: 51). This vision of generating the space for the participation of broader society is

aligned with Otto's (1999: 167) exploration of the post-colonial in relation to international law, in arguing that processes of peace should change and reappropriate central issues to locate the 'disenfranchised' *inside* the dominant discourse. Thus, she posits the key question as, 'How to push at the boundaries of modernity rather than how to give voice to what is outside it?' (Otto 1999: 171). To translate this directly to the situation in Sri Lanka, we might suggest the question is how to push at the boundaries of a hierarchical and violent peace in order to recognize the everyday strategies of vulnerable individuals and communities as the key to transforming it.

In determining the need for a new vision and vocabulary, synergizing the 'micro' and the 'macro', the issue of where we locate the site of interaction and initiation is critical. It is easy to assert that the responsibility of instigating change lies with civil society and that a focus on its role and ideas of peace can take ideas of peace away from a state-centric framework (Uyangoda 2002: 214). However, in reality, the practicalities of such an approach are complex and extremely difficult. Throughout this thesis, it has become clear that any notion of a 'democratic civil society' (ibid) does not exist in the North and East of Sri Lanka, where the competing claims to power seriously compromise any right to express opinions, to move freely and to live without violence. Goodhand and Lewer (1999: 69-88) address this problem by stating that although it must be recognized that, in the Sri Lankan context, civil society in whatever form can contain the potential for greater interaction, this cannot bear the totality of responsibility for effecting deeper participation. Thus, the ambiguities of 'local' and of 'community' demand a sensitive and carefully mapped out approach to peace. McGregor takes this to mean that the 'social energy' needed to effect change from the margins may not yet exist comprehensively.

However, this view also misses the everyday strategies that have formed the central premise of this thesis and which reveal that 'social energy' and the ability to face head-on violence and threat do exist, but in more subtle and sensitive forms. Moreover, the very reason it manages to exist in the first place is that they remain firmly embedded within the crevices and fluid spaces of everyday living, not seeking recognition and appreciation, but rather working at living on and through violence to effect change from within. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, this is an approach that is sensitive to political shaping of action, but hostile to the effects of normal politics. Therefore the point is that this work *is* being done – by those whose work is overlooked but to some extent *has* to be overlooked - for these people who set things in motion it is about hope and change which is tightly tied to the everyday pockets of space to create spaces of relative calm or peace. This peace is about making lives more bearable and making small investments in a more humane future. The

question that needs to be addressed therefore is if and how this kind of work can be more broadly effective and mapped onto wider processes of peace building.



Figure 19: Mothers in the *Valkai* group (2007)

## 7.4 In Light of Small Beginnings

### A search for balance

One of the main topics of conversation that took place in our household on those dark, humid nights when we were without power was how to sustain balance while confusion and chaos cut through everyday experiences and meaning; in other words how to live in the midst of a geography of suffering, and how to keep your feet down no matter what forces try to pull you off centre. To answer this question, Anuloja the ‘mother’ of my household, shared with me something she had written a number of years earlier when she had found herself reflecting on a similar question. Her words are written out below,

Once balance is reached with-in and with-out it does not stay that way. There is nothing static in the growth process. The more open to self and environment I am the more I enter into the cycle of awareness; imbalance – search – balance. It’s the spiral of life. A journey. It’s a sense of movement so the me of yesterday is not the me of today. It’s like travelling closer and closer to a beloved home. The home is not out there but here in our hearts (Anuloja 1998).

I have quoted Anuloja’s words here not only because they so eloquently capture her search for meaning at that time, but because they also seem to grasp the essence of the lives and stories that have been told in this thesis in terms of the struggle faced by people across

Eastern Sri Lanka. By tracing the lives of individuals, the chapters here have shown the importance of trying to grapple with such issues of meaning and balance, and have emphasized how relations to violence and peace are far more intimate, personal, indissoluble than they might initially seem. Crucially, they address the links between violence, imagination, and anticipation which are hinged upon a notion of balance, integral to everyday endurance. This is a balance of the experiences of grief and loss, of moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar, of letting go of the security of what you have and what you have lost. To be able to imagine a different space for the future thus entails a balancing of the past, present, and the future, of shadows of memories and glimpses of dreams for the future. Where imaginings take place within the boundaries of what is known, of what is ordinary, they also escape beyond these confines to envisage an ordinary life that can hold alternative meanings and a different life. Therefore, while there will always be fragmented shards of memory – some reflecting light, others opening deeper wounds - a balance can still be found.

It is this search for balance that I believe falls upon the shoulders of anthropologists and ethnographers to elucidate in order to bear witness to the complex dynamics of an everyday space. As I have noted within this thesis, this responsibility is not always because people cannot speak for themselves or because we, as ethnographers, are in a privileged moral position (Das 2003). Often, it is more the case that a climate of danger, or risk, and of an urgent need to attend to the practicalities of everyday life means that those who do not step away from a situation are unable to write. This is where I have located my responsibility to describe the unique present moment in Batticaloa that I entered into, while incorporating a sense of what took place before, what others have said and what people spoke of for the future. In bringing together such threads, an attempt can take place to create something that does not focus exclusively on violence but equally does not embed it so deep in the crevices of everyday life that it becomes 'normal'. However, as the trope of witnessing suggests, anthropologists in conflict areas are able to pose both methodological and political questions, and especially expose the muddled nature of participation and observation which are 'inherently political activities' (Hoffman 2003). Hoffman states, 'presence requires participation', for in reality there is no such thing as 'neutral, uninvolved observation' (2003: 3). Throughout this thesis I have addressed concerns over issues of power and agency and suggested that there are no pre-ordained answers as to how one conducts oneself in volatile contexts where questions of ethics, morality and responsibility will continuously be raised. Therefore the chapters illuminate the complexity of this reality, while also highlighting the relevance of building relationships within and across contexts and questioning the substance of those relationships and what can be understood from inside and out. Mahmood (2002: 1)

has argued that ethnography (particularly in emotionally and physically challenging spaces) tends to produce unusually close bonds with research subjects. The intimacy of these bonds, and the experience of bearing witness, is every aspect of one's scholarship, making the fallacy of the divide between field methodology, theory, and political engagement even more conspicuous (Mahmood *ibid*, Hoffman 2003). At the same time it also makes the lines between empathy and identification particularly ambiguous, which for researchers in contexts of violent and unsettled regions, raises far more questions about representation than it does of rapport.

My experiences of living in Batticaloa, leaving Batticaloa and finding a way to write about Batticaloa have also been about finding a balance. When I first started writing after leaving the field, I experienced a painful period of confusion; I found it impossible to translate what felt like a catastrophe of memories onto paper. There was so much that I wanted to say and I could not find a way. There was also much that I did not want to remember but yet it still forced its way into my consciousness and, for a while, distorted reality, and my sense of *being* in the present. In addition, the pressure I felt to do justice to the lives I had admired, learnt from and grown to love, became a paralysis to my writing, as did my lost hope for the future of Batticaloa. Lawrence (1997: 97), in her PhD thesis, expresses a similar experience and notes that 'the overwhelming fears and uncertainties insides zones of war can paralyze expressiveness'. However, it has been in the process of thawing out these frozen thoughts, of re-locating my memories and reality in relation to a firmer sense of the past, present and future that I have found my balance again. In finding a space where both the sadness of loss and recognition of hope can exist, I have had to also engage with vulnerability and with the responsibility to ties of relationships. Therefore, my academic journey to describe the importance of endurance and balance in the everyday lives of people in Batticaloa has also well reflected in my personal journey to find a balance in my writing as well as understand how my life has been shaped and changed by those in Batticaloa.

## **In conclusion**

In 1989, Rajini Thiranagama wrote the following as a post script to *The Broken Palmyra*,

Within this tragic history there is still an attempt by concerned people to think coherently of the future. There are debates going on as to the correct path for survival, organization and possible breakthroughs. There is, especially in the North, a limited attempt at organizing at the grass-roots level, so as to handle the repressive situation and violence from all sides. These are very small beginnings indeed...For the people, any solution to the brutal and intense violence has to come from within the

communities and cannot be imposed from outside. The development of these internal structures is a long and arduous task, a process which is only just beginning to be comprehended (Thiranagama 1989).

Reflecting on the state of life in the Northern Sri Lanka at that time, Rajini recognized the enormity of the task facing Tamil-speaking communities while locating the fragile shoots of hope as ‘small beginnings’ embedded within the strategies of everyday endurance. Then, as now, the small beginning of hope remains critical for the future of the North and East and for any sense of peace that can be built from the loss that war has brought. There are many voices which, despite underpinning the foundations of and echoing throughout this thesis, sadly cannot be identified and named. Forced into silence in this written form however, they have not been silenced in Batticaloa, and in their own ways, through their own means, they continue to call out for justice while they push through boundaries and borders claiming witness to the continued struggle that everyday endurance faces. It is these voices that have created this work of stories, memories, and hopes for the future which dwell in the spaces of Batticaloa and testify to the everyday endurance of the people.

In drawing to the end, I find that much remains unfinished; there are spaces that are yet to be understood and lives that are yet to be given meaning. These are spaces that invite further research and sketch out the kinds of questions that could be followed up. Widening my focus from what has been made possible and of what has been able to work, my hope is that a sensitive and careful research can further strengthen the connections and ties of those who actively but quietly push for change. If balance can be attended to, if unfamiliar and frightening spaces can be further opened and made safer, and if the value of grief can reflect on the value of life, then it can be hoped that individuals and families across Eastern Sri Lanka, will no longer, like Rani and her children, need to plant trees to remember lives. Instead, they can focus on and enrich the spaces that *Kuti annar maram* and other trees have opened up, to invest in a different future and new beginnings.





Figure 20: Children playing in the sea, Batticaloa (2005)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu-Lughod, L. (1992). *Writing Women's Stories: Bedouin Stories*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (1986) *Veiled Sentiments*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by D. Heller-Roazen. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Agarwal, B. (1990). 'Gender and Land Rights in Sri Lanka.' World Employment Program Research: Working Paper No. 49 – Rural Employment Policy Research Program Policy Series, ILO, Geneva.
- (1996) [1994]. *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Alison, M. (2003). 'Cogs in the wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam'. *Civil Wars* 6 (4): 55–82.
- Amerasinghe, N. (1976). 'An overview of settlement schemes Sri Lanka'. *Asian Survey* 16: 620-36.
- Amin, S. (1995). *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Anderson, J. (1983). *The Architecture of Cognition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- Antze, P. & Lambek, M. (eds.) (1996). *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*. London: Routledge.
- Arasaratnam, S. (1994). 'Sri Lanka's Tamils under colonial rule'. In B. Pfaffenberger & C. Manogaran (eds.) *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity*. Oxford: Westview Press.
- Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Arnold, D., & Blackburn, S., (2004). 'Introduction'. In D. Arnold. & S. Blackburn, (ed) *Telling lives in India: biography, autobiography, and life history*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & H. Tiffin, (1998). *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Athukorala, P., & Resosudarmo, B. (2006), 'The Indian Ocean tsunami: economic impact, disaster management, and lessons', *Asian Economic Papers*. New York: 1-39.
- Bachelard, G. (1994 [1960]). *The Poetics of Space*. New York: Beacon Press.
- Bähre, E. (2007). 'Reluctant Solidarity: Death, urban poverty and neighbourly assistance in South Africa'. *Ethnography* 8(1): 33-59.

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). 'Discourse in the novel'. In C. Emerson & M. Holquist (eds.). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin and London: University of Texas Press.
- (1984). *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- (1993). *Toward a philosophy of the act*. Austin: Texas University Press.
- Balasingham, A. (1983). *Women and revolution: The Role of Women in Tamil Eelam National Liberation*. London: Fairmax Publishing.
- (1993). *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers*. London: LTTE Publication Section.
- Balasingham, A. (1998). *Will to Freedom. An Inside View of Tamil Resistance*. London: Fairmax.
- Bastian, S. (2003). 'Foreign aid, globalization and conflict in Sri Lanka'. In M. Mayer, D. Rajasingham-Senanayake, & Y. Thangarajah (eds.). *Building Local Capacities for Peace: Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Macmillan.
- Becker, D. (1995). 'The deficiency of the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder when dealing with victims of human rights violations'. In R. Kelber, C. Figley, & B. Gersons. (eds.). *Beyond Trauma: Cultural and Societal Dynamics*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Berkwitz, S. (2008). 'Introduction' (Review Symposium). *Religion* 38: 172-173.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bharucha, R. (1983). *Rehearsals of Revolution*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Blacklock, C., & Crosby A. (2004). 'The sounds of silence: feminist research across time in Guatemala'. In W. Giles & J. Hyndman (eds.) *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.
- Bloch, M. (1975). *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*. London: Academic Press.
- Bloch, (1983), *Marxism and Anthropology: The History of a Relationship*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bohle, H. G. (2007). 'Living with vulnerability. Livelihoods and human security in risky environments' *InterSrcTions* ('Interdisciplinary Security ConnecTions') 6: 1-32.
- Bohle, H., & Fünfgeld. H. (2007). 'The political ecology of violence in eastern Sri Lanka', *Development and Change* 38 (4): 665-687.
- Bose, S. (1994). *States, Nations and Sovereignty*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Bourke, J. (2007). *Rape: A Cultural History*. London: Virago.
- Brow, J. (1996). *Demons and Development: The Struggle for Community in a Sri Lankan Village*. Arizona: The University of Arizona Press.
- Bruner, J. (1991). 'The narrative construction of reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1): 1–21.
- Butalia, U. (2000 [1998]). *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- Campbell, D. (1998). 'MetaBosnia: narratives of the Bosnian war', *Review of International Studies* 24: 261-281.
- Campbell, R. (2002). *Emotionally Involved: the Impact of Researching Rape*. London: Routledge.
- Chandraprema, C.A. (1991) *Sri Lanka, the Years of Terror*. Colombo: Lake House Bookshop.
- Cerwonka, A., & Malkki, L. (2007). *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Clarke, A. (2005). 'The day after tsunami: new waves of human spirit and perseverance in Sri Lanka', *Daily Mirror*, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- Clancy, M., & Hamber, B. (2008). 'Trauma, peace-building, and development: An overview of key positions and critical questions'. Paper presented at the *Trauma, Development and Peacebuilding Conference*, New Delhi, India: 1-51.
- Cockburn, C. (1998). *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict*. London: Zed Press.
- (2004). *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus*. London: Zed Press.
- (2007). *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis*. London: Zed Press.
- Comaroff, J. (1991). 'Missionaries and mechanical clocks: an essay on religion and history in South Africa'. *Journal of Religion* 71 (1): 1-17.
- Connerton, P. (1989). *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coomaraswamy, R. (1996). 'Tiger women and the question of women's emancipation', *Pravada* 4 (9): 8-10.
- (1998). 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, on trafficking in women, women's migration and violence against women', submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1997/44, 56th session of the Commission on Human Rights. (E/CN.4/2000/68).

- (2002). 'Violence, Armed Conflict and the Community', In S. Jayaweera (ed.) *Women in Post-Independence Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Coy, P. (2001). 'Shared risks and research dilemma on a Peace Brigades international team in Sri Lanka', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 30(5): 575-606.
- Crook, S. (1998). 'Minotaurs and other monsters: 'everyday life' in recent social theory', *Sociology*, 32(3): 523-540.
- Daniel, V. (1984). *Fluid Signs. Being a Person the Tamil Way*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (1994). 'The Individual in Terror'. In T. Csordas, *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press .
- (1996). *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Daniel, V., & Thangarajah, Y. (1995). 'Forms, formations and transformations of the Tamil refugee'. In V. Daniel & E. Knudsen (eds.) *Mistrusting Refugees*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dart, J. (1985). *Ethnic Identity and Marginality Among the Coast Veddas of Sri Lanka*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, San Diego.
- Das, V. (1990). 'Our Work to Cry: Your Work to Listen'. In V. Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Delhi: Oxford University Press (OUP).
- (1994). *Mirrors Of Violence: Communities, Riots And Survivors In South Asia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (1995). *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- (1997), 'Language and body: transactions in the construction of pain'. In A. Kleinman, V. Das & M. Lock., *Social Suffering*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- (2003). 'Trauma, testimony and the making of political community', Paper presented to the Dept. of Anthropology 10<sup>th</sup> February 2003. Durham N.C: Duke University.
- (2007). *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (2008). 'Violence, gender, and subjectivity', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37: 283– 99.
- Das, V., & Kleinman, A. (2000). 'Introduction'. In V. Das, A. Kleinman, R. Mamphela & P. Reynolds (eds.) *Violence and Subjectivity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Das. V., & Kleinman, A., Lock, M. & Mamphela, R. & Reynolds, P. (eds.), (2001). *Remaking A World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery*. California: University of California Press.
- Das. V., & Poole, D. (eds.), (2004). *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*. Sante Fe, New Mexico: SAR Press.
- David, K. (1973). 'Until marriage do us part: A cultural account of Jaffna Tamil categories for kinsmen', *Man* (n.s.) 8(4): 521-535.
- (1980). 'Hidden powers; cultural and socio-economic accounts of Jaffna women'. In S. Wadley (ed.), *The Powers of Tamil Women*. Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.
- De Certeau, M. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- De Alwis, M. (1995). 'Gender, politics and the 'respectable lady'' in P. Jeganathan & Q. Ismail (eds.), *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.
- (1997). 'Motherhood as a space for protest: women's political participation in contemporary Sri Lanka' in B. Amrita & P. Jeffrey (eds.). *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and the Politicization of Religion in South Asia*. London and New York: Routledge.
- (2002). 'The Changing Role of Women in Sri Lankan Society' *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Social Sciences* 69(3): 675-691.
- (2004). 'The "Purity" of Displacement and the Reterritorialization of Longing: Muslim IDPs in North Western Sri Lanka'. In W. Giles & J. Hyndman (eds.). *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.
- (2009). 'Interrogating the 'political': feminist peace activism in Sri Lanka' in *Feminist Review* 91: 81-93.
- Deleuze, G. (1993). *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. London: Athlone Press.
- Deleuze. G., & Felix. G (1994) *What is Philosophy?*, translated by H. Tomlinson & G. Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press.
- De Mel, N. (1998). 'Agent or victim? the Sri Lankan woman militant in the interregnum'. In M. Roberts (ed.). *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited. Vol. II*. Colombo: Marga Institute.
- (2002). 'Fractured Narratives: Notes on women in conflict in Sri Lanka and Pakistan' *Development*. 45(1): 99-104.
- (2007). *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict*. London: Sage Publications.
- De Mel & K. Ruwanpura, (2006). *Gendering the Tsunami: Women's Experiences from Sri Lanka*. International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo: Sri Lanka.

- De Silva, A. (2008). 'Ethnicity, politics and inequality: post-tsunami humanitarian aid delivery in Ampara District, Sri Lanka' *Disasters*, 33(2): 253–273.
- De Silva, K.M. (1973a). 'The reform and nationalist movements in the early twentieth century'. In K. De Silva (ed.). *History of Ceylon: Volume Three*. Peradeniya: University of Ceylon, Peradeniya.
- (1973b), 'The History and Politics of the Transfer of Power'. In K. De Silva (ed.). *History of Ceylon: Volume Three*. Peradeniya: University of Ceylon, Peradeniya.
- (1986). *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880-1985*, Lanham, USA: University Press of America.
- (1987) 'Separatist ideology in Sri Lanka: a historical appraisal of the claim for the "Traditional homelands" of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Occasional Papers No.1.
- De Silva, K.M., & H. Wriggins (1994 [1988]) *J.R. Jayawardene of Sri Lanka (two volumes)*. London: Lee Cooper/Pensword Books, and London, Colombo: J.R. Jayawardene Cultural Centre.
- De Silva, M. (1994). 'Women in the LTTE: liberation or subjugation?' *Pravada* 3(7): 27-31.
- De Silva, W.I. (1997). *Population Projections for Sri Lanka: 1991-2041*. Colombo: Institute for Policy Studies.
- Dirks, N.B. (2008). *Castes of Mind. Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Dumont, L. (1953). 'The Dravidian kinship terminology as an expression of marriage,' *Man* 53: 34–9.
- (1957). *Hierarchy and Marriage Alliance in South Indian Kinship*. (RAI Occasional Paper, 12) London: Royal Anthropological Institute.
- (1966). Descent or Intermarriage? A Relational View of Australian Section Systems. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 22: 231-250.
- (1970). *Homo Hierarchicus*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (1983). *Affinity as a Value: Marriage Alliance in South India, with Comparative Essays on Australia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eastmond, M. (2007). 'Stories as lived experience: narratives in forced migration research'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20(2): 248-264.
- Eddleston, M. et. al. (1999). 'Epidemic of self-poisoning with seeds of the yellow oleander tree (*Thevetia peruviana*) in northern Sri Lanka', *Tropical Medicine and International Health* 4(4): 266-273.
- Edwards, R., & Ribbens, J. (1998), 'Living on the edges: Public knowledge, private lives, personal experience', in R. Edwards & J. Ribbens (eds.). *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*. London: Sage.

- Emmanuel, S (2005) 'Sri Lankan women's small but significant gains in the post tsunami reconstruction process', *Forum News*, May – August 2005, 18 (2).
- Enloe, C. (1983). *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives*. South End: South End Press.
- (1998). 'All the men are in militias, all the women are victims: The politics of masculinity and femininity in nationalist wars'. In L. Lorentzen, & J. Turpin (eds.). *The Women & War Reader*. New York: New York University Press.
- Feldman, A. (1991). *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- (1995). 'Ethnographic States of Emergency'. In C. Nordstrom, & A.C.G.M. Robben (eds.). *Fieldwork Under Fires: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (2000). 'Violence and Vision: the prosthetics and aesthetics of terror'. In V. Das, A. Kleinman, R. Mamphela & P. Reynolds (eds.). *Violence and Subjectivity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Felman, S., & Laub. D. (1992). *Testimony. Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Felski, R. (2002). 'Introduction', *New Literary History*, 33(4): 607-622.
- Ferdinand, J, Pearson. G. Rowe M, & Worthington, F (2007). 'A different kind of ethics' *Ethnography*. 8(4): 519-543.
- Finnström, S. (2008). *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*. London: Duke University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon.
- (1965). *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- (1969). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by. A. M. Sheridan Smith. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fraser. I, (2005). 'Small fish trampled in post-tsunami stampede' *Forced Migration Review* (FMR) (Special Issue July 2005): 39.
- Freks, G., & Klem B. J (2005). *Tsunami Response in Sri Lanka, Report on a Field Visit from 6-20th February*. Clingendael Institute, Wageningen University.
- (2009) 'Muddling the peace process: The political dynamics of the tsunami aid and conflict'. In J. Goodhand, et al. (eds.). *Aid, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka*. London: Routledge.
- Fuglerud, O. (1998). 'Space and Movement in the Sri Lankan Conflict'. Working paper. *Centre for Development and the Environment*. University of Oslo.
- (1999). *Life on the Outside: The Tamil Diaspora and Long Distance Nationalism*. London: Pluto.



- (2004). 'Local Communities and State Ambitions in Eastern Sri Lanka'. In M. Mayer, D. Rajasingham-Senanayake & Y. Thangarajah (eds.). *Building Local Capacities for Peace. Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: Macmillan.
- Fuller, C.J. (1976). *The Nayars Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Galtung, J. (1969). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilisation*, London: Sage Publications.
- Gamage, S., & Watson, I.B. 'Introduction'. In S. Gamage & I.B. Watson (eds.) (1999). *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the East or the 'Island of Tears'?* New Delhi/London: Sage Publications.
- Gamburd, M. R. (2000). *The Kitchen Spoon's Handle: Transnationalism and Sri Lanka's Migrant Housemaids*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- (2004). 'The Economics of Enlisting: A Village View of Armed Service'. In D. Winslow & M. Woost (eds.). *Economy and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Garfinkle, H. (1952). *The Perception of the Other: A Study of Social Order* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Sociology, Harvard University.
- (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Gell, A. (1992). *The Anthropology of Time: Cultural Constructions of temporal Maps and Images*. Oxford: Berg.
- Geertz, C. (2000). *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Genet, J. (1986) *Prisoner of Love*. New York: NYRB Classics.
- Giles, W., & Hyndman J. (eds.) (2004). *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. California: University of California Press.
- Giles, W, De Alwis, M., Klein, E., & de Silva, N. (eds.) (2003). *Feminists Under Fire: Exchanges Across War Zones*. Toronto: Between the Lines Press.
- Gilsenan, M. (1996). *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society*. London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.
- Goffman, E. (1956). 'Embarrassment and social organization', *American Journal of Sociology* 62: 264-271.
- (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London: Penguin.
- Gombrich, R., & Obeyesekere, G. (1988). *Buddhism Transformed: Tgious Change in Sri Lanka*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Good, A. (1980). 'Elder sister's daughter marriage in South Asia', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 36: 474-500.

- (1981). 'Prescription, preference, and practice: marriage patterns among the Kondaiyankottai Maravar of south India', *Man* (N.S.) 16: 109–29.
- (1991). *The Female Bridegroom* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- (2007). *Anthropology and Expertise in the Asylum Courts*. Oxford and New York: Routledge-Cavendish.
- (2008). 'Review of Learning Politics from Sivaram' *Anthropos* 103: 298.
- Goodhand, J., & Hulme, D. (1999). 'From wars to complex political emergencies: understanding conflict and peace-building in the new world disorder.' *Third World Quarterly*, 20 (1): 13-26.
- Goodhand J., & Klem, B. (with D. Fonseka, S.I. Keethaponcalan & S. Sardesai) (2005). *Aid, Conflict, and Peace building in Sri Lanka 2000–2005*. Asia Foundation, Colombo.
- Goodhand, J., & Lewer N. (1999). 'Sri Lanka: NGOs and peace-building in complex political emergencies' *Third World Quarterly* 20(1): 69-88.
- Goody. J., & Tambiah S. J. (1973). *Bridewealth and Dowry* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goonasekera, S. (2007). *Walking to Kataragama*. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo: Sri Lanka.
- Green, L. (1994). 'Fear as a Way of Life.' *Cultural Anthropology*, 9 (2): 147-172.
- (1995). 'The Paradoxes of War and Its Aftermath: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala'. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 19(1): 73-75.
- (1999). *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Greenhouse, C.J. (1996). *A Moment's Notice: Time Politics across Cultures*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gunaratne, A. (2001). 'What's in a name? Aryans and Dravidians in the making of Sri Lankan identities'. In N. De Silva (ed.). *The Hybrid island: Culture Crossing in the Inversion of Identity in Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Social Scientist Association (SSA) and London: Zed Books.
- Gunaratna, R. (1994). *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka – The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies*. Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict Research.
- (1998) 'LTTE Child Combatants,' *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 7:98.
- (2001). *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution? – The Inside Story of the JVP*. Kandy: Institute of Fundamental Studies.
- Gunaratne, M.H. (2000). *For a Sovereign State – A True Story on Sri Lanka's Separatist War*. Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha.

- Gunawardana, R.A.L.H. (1990). 'The people of the lion: the Sinhala identity and ideology in history and historiography'. In J. Spencer (ed.). *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*. London and New York: Routledge: 45-86.
- (1995). *Historiography in a Time of Ethnic Conflict. Construction of the Past in Contemporary Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association (SSA).
- Gupta, A., & Ferguson J. (1992). 'Beyond culture: space, identity and the politics of difference', *Cultural Anthropology* 7(1): 6-23.
- Haanstad, E.J. (2009). 'Violence and Temporal Subject' *Anthropology and Humanism*, 34(1): 71-82.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Halbwachs, M. (1980). *The Collective Memory*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Hallisey, C. (n.d). *Between intuition and judgement: Moral creativity in Theravada Buddhist ethics*. Harvard Divinity School.
- Hamber, B. (2006). 'Nunca mas and the politics of the person: Can truth telling prevent the reoccurrence of violence?' In T. A. Borer (ed.). *Telling truths: Truth telling and peace building in post-conflict societies*. Notre Dame & Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press: 207-230.
- Hamber, B., & Kelly, G. (2005). *A Place for Reconciliation? Conflict and Locality in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Democratic Dialogue. Report 18.
- Handler, R. (1988). *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Harrison, P. (2000). 'Making sense: embodiment and the sensibilities of the everyday. Environment and planning D'. *Society and Space* 18: 497-517.
- Harvey, D. (1989). *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1996). *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hastrup, K. (1992). *Other Histories*. London: Routledge.
- Hearn, J. (1998). *The Violences of Men: How Men Talk About and How Agencies Respond to Men's Violence to Women*. London: Sage.
- Hellmann-Rajanayagam, D. (1990). 'The politics of the Tamil past'. In J. Spencer (ed.) *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*. London: Routledge.
- Hensman, R. (1985). 'Feminism and ethnic nationalism in Sri Lanka', *Journal of Gender Studies*. 1 (4): 501-6.
- Herring, R. J. (1972). 'The forgotten paddy lands act in Ceylon: Ideology, capacity and response' *Modern Ceylon Studies* 3 (2): 99-124.

- Hertzfeld, M. (1987). *Critical Ethnography in the margins of Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hettige, S. T. (2000). Dilemmas of Post-Colonial Society after 50 Years of Independence: A Critical Analysis. In S. Hettige & M. Mayer (ed.) *Sri Lanka at Crossroads: Dilemmas and Prospects After 50 Years of Independence*. Delhi: Macmillan.
- Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger T. (eds.) (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoekzema, A. (1999). 'Tamil livelihoods in Muthur, Sri Lanka'. Trincomalee/Wageningen, unpublished MSc-thesis.
- Hoffman, D. (2003). 'Frontline anthropology: Research in a time of war.' *Anthropology Today*. 19 (3): 9-12.
- Holland, D., & Lave, J. (2001). 'Introduction' in D. Holland & J. Lave (eds.) *History in Person: Enduring Struggles, Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities*. Santa Fé: School of American Research Press.
- Hollup, O. (1994). *Bonded Labour: Caste and Cultural identity among Tamil plantation workers in Sri Lanka*, Sri Lanka: Charles Subasinghe & Sons.
- Hoole, R. Somasundaram, D, K., Sritharan, K., & Thiranagama, R. (1988). *The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka – An Inside Account*. Claremont, California: Sri Lanka Studies Institute.
- Hoole, R. (2001). *Sri Lanka: The Arrogance of Power: Myths Decadence & Murder*. Colombo: University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna).
- Hoskins, J. (1993). *The Play of Time: Kodi Perspectives on Calendars, History, and Exchange*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hume, M. (2007). 'Unpicking the threads: Emotion as central to the theory and practice of researching violence' *Women's Studies International Forum*. 30(2): 147-157.
- Hyndman, J., & De Alwis, M (2004). Bodies, Shrines, and Roads: Violence, (im)mobility and displacement in Sri Lanka in *Gender, Place and Culture*, 11(4): 535-557.
- ICES, (2003). July '83 and After. Special Issue. *Nethra*, Journal of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies 6 (1 & 2).
- Ismail. Q., & Jeganathan, P. (eds.), (1995). *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*. South Focus Press.
- Ismail, Q. (2005). *Abiding by Sri Lanka. On Peace, Place and Postcoloniality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (2008). 'Response: On close reading and going too far'. *Religion* 38: 191-194.
- Jackson, M. (1996). 'Introduction: Phenomenology, radical empiricism, and anthropological critique'. In M. Jackson (ed.) *Things as they are: New directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*, edited by M. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- (2002). *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press.
- Jayaweera, S. (1969). 'Recent trends in Educational Expansion in Ceylon'. *International Review of Education* 15: 277-93.
- (2002). 'Women in Education and Employment'. In S. Jayaweere, (ed.) *Women in Post-Independence Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications.
- Jeganathan, P. (1998). 'Violence' as an analytical problem: Sri Lankanist anthropology after July 1983' *Nethra* .Journal of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies 2(4): 7-47.
- (2004). 'Checkpoint: anthropology, identity, and the state'. In Das. V & D. Poole (eds.) *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*. Sante Fe, New Mexico: SAR Press.
- Kakar, S. (1981). *The Inner World: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kalyvas, S. N. (2006). *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kapadia, K. (1995). *Siva and Her Sisters: Gender, Caste, and Class in Rural South India*. Boulder: San Francisco: Oxford: Westview Press.
- Kapferer, B. (1998 [1988]). *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*. Second edition. Crawford Press.
- Kaplan, R. (1996). *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Kearney, R.N. (1975). 'Educational expansion and political volatility in Sri Lanka: The 1971 Insurrection' *Asian Survey* 15: 727-44.
- (1985). 'Ethnic Conflict and the Tamil Separatist Movement in Sri Lanka' *Asian Survey* 25 (9): 898-917.
- (1987) 'Territorial elements of Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka' *Pacific Affairs*, 60, No. 4: 561-577.
- Kearney, R. N., & Miller. B, D. (1985). 'The spiral of suicide and social change in Sri Lanka'. *Journal of Asian Studies*. 45 (1): 81-101.
- (1987). *Internal migration in Sri Lanka and its social consequences*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Keenan, A. (2003). *Democracy in Question: Democratic Openness in a Time of Political Closure* California: Stanford University Press.
- Kelly, L. (1988). *Surviving Sexual Violence*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Kelly, T. (2008). 'The attractions of accountancy: Living an ordinary life during the second Palestinian intifada'. *Ethnography* 9 (3): 351-376.

- (2009). 'The UN Committee against Torture: Human Rights Monitoring and the Legal Recognition of Cruelty' *Human Rights Quarterly* 31:777-800.
- Kemper, S. (1991) *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kirmayer, L. (2003). Failure of Imagination: The refugee's narrative in psychiatry. *Anthropology and Medicine* 10(2): 167-185.
- Kleinman, A. (1995). *Writing at the Margin: Discourse between Anthropology and Medicine*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (1977), 'Depression, somatization and the new cross-cultural psychiatry'. *Social Science and Medicine* 11: 3-10.
- Kleinman, A., & Das. V. (2001). 'Introduction'. In A. Kleinman, V. Das, R. Mamphela & P. Reynolds (eds.) *Remaking A World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kleinman, A., & Kleinman, J. (1994). 'How bodies remember: social memory and bodily experience of criticism, resistance, and delegitimation following China's cultural revolution' *New Literary History*, 25(3): 707-723.
- Knighton, W. (1845) *The History of Ceylon from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans.
- Korf, B. (2007). 'Antimonies of generosity: Moral geographies and post-Tsunami aid in Southeast Asia'. *Geoforum*. 38 (2): 366-378.
- Korf, B. & Silva K. T. (2003). 'Poverty, Ethnicity and Conflict in Sri Lanka,' paper presented at University of Bonn: Centre for Development Research and University of Peradeniya: Department of Sociology.
- Korf, B, Hasbullah, S, Hollenbach. P, & Klem, B. (2009). 'The gift of disaster: the commodification of good intentions in post-tsunami Sri Lanka' *Disasters*: 34(1): 560-577.
- Lawrence, P. (1997). 'Work of Oracles, Silence of Terror: Notes on the Injury of War in Eastern Sri Lanka'. Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Colorado.
- (1999). 'The changing amman: notes on the injury of war in Eastern Sri Lanka'. In S. Gamage & I.B. Watson (eds.) *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka*. London: Sage Publications.
- (2000). 'Violence; Suffering; Amman: The work of oracles in Sri Lanka's Eastern war zone'. In Das, V, A. Kleinman, R. Mamphela & P. Reynolds (eds.) *Violence and Subjectivity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (2003). *The Ocean Stories: Children, Imagination, Creativity, and Reconciliation in Eastern Sri Lanka*. Colombo: ICES.
- Leach, E.R. (1951). 'The structural implications of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 81: 23-55.

- (1955). 'Polyandry, inheritance and the definition of marriage' *Man* 55: 199.
- (1961). *Pul Eliya: a Village in Ceylon, a Study of Land Tenure and Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Le Billon, P. (2000). 'The political economy of war: what relief agencies need to know'. *HPN-Network Paper* 33. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Lee, R. M. (1995) *Dangerous Fieldwork*. Thousand Oakes: Sage.
- Lefèbvre, H. (1971). *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, translated by S. Rabinovitch. New York: Harper and Row.
- (1991). *The Production of Space*, translated by D. Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1967). *Structural Anthropology*, New York: Anchor.
- Levi, P. (1988). *The Drowned and the Saved*. New York: Summit Books.
- Lewis, J. P. (1993 [1895]). *A Manual of the Vanni Districts*, Ceylon New Delhi: Navrang.
- Liyanage, S. (2003). 'A comment on the peace talks: provincializing vital issues' *Polity*, 1(1): 6-8.
- Lorentzen, L. A. & J. E. Turpin (eds.), (1998) *The Women and War Reader*. New York: New York University Press.
- Lykes, M. B., & Mersky, M. (2006). 'Reparations and mental health: Psychosocial interventions towards healing, human agency and rethreading social realities'. In P. De Greiff (ed.) *The Handbook of Reparations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MacDowell, C. (1996). *A Tamil Asylum Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland*. Oxford: Berghahn.
- Mahmood, C. K. (1996). *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- (2002). 'Anthropological compulsions in a world in crisis'. *Anthropology Today* 18(3): 1-2.
- Marcus, G. E., & Cushman D. (1982). 'Ethnographies as texts'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11: 25-69.
- Marcus, G. E., & Fischer, M. M. J. (1986). *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Martin, E. (2007). 'Violence, language, and the everyday life'. *American Ethnologist*, 34(4): 741-745.
- Massey, D. (1994). *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (1995). *Spatial Divisions of Labor: Social Structures and the Geography of Production Capitals* (2nd edition). New York: Routledge.

- Maunaguru, S. (1995). 'Gendering Tamil nationalism: The construction of 'women' in projects of protest and control'. In Jeganathan, P & Ismail, Q. (eds.) *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Social Scientists Association: 158-76.
- Mayer, M. (2000). 'Life opportunities and youth conflict in Sri Lanka. Challenges for regional development planning'. In S. Hettige & M. Mayer (ed.) *Sri Lanka at Crossroads: Dilemmas and Prospects After 50 Years of Independence*. Delhi: Macmillan.
- Mbembe, A. (1995). 'Figures of the subject in times of crisis'. *Public Culture*, 7(2): 323-352.
- McDowell, C. (1996). *A Tamil Asylum Diaspora Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement, and Politics in Switzerland*. New York: Berghahn.
- McEntire, D. A. (2001). 'Triggering agents, vulnerabilities and disaster reduction: towards a holistic paradigm.' *Disaster Prevention and Management* 10(3): 189-196.
- McGilvray, D. B. (1982a). 'Introduction' in McGilvray (eds.). *Caste ideology and Interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1-8.
- (1982b). Mukkuvar Vannimai: Tamil caste and matriclan ideology in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka' in McGilvray (eds.) *Caste Ideology and Interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 34-98.
- (1982c). 'Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Mechanics: Eurasian Ethnicity in Sri Lanka,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24 (2): 235-263.
- (1998). *Symbolic Heat: Gender, Health and Worship among the Tamils of South India and Sri Lanka*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing Pvt Ltd.
- (2004). 'Jailani: A sufi shrine in Sri Lanka'. In Reifeld. H & Ahmad. I (ed.) *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adoption, Accommodation and Conflict*. Delhi: Social Science Press.
- (2006). 'Tsunami and civil war in Sri Lanka: An anthropologist confronts the real world' *India Review* 5(3-4): 372-393.
- (2008). *Crucible of Conflict. Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- McGilvray, D. & Raheem. M, (2007). Muslim perspectives on the Sri Lankan conflict. *Policy Studies* 41. Washington: East-West Center.
- McGregor, L. (2006). 'Beyond the time and space of peace talks: re-appropriating the peace process in Sri Lanka' *International Journal of Peace Studies* 11(1): 40-57.
- McRobbie, A. (2006). 'Vulnerability, violence and (cosmopolitan) ethics: Butler's Precarious Life', *The British Journal of Sociology* 2006 Vol. 57(1): 70-85.
- Mines, M. (1994). *Public Faces, Private Voices. Community and Individuality in South India*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.



- Moore, M. (1985). *The State and Peasant Politics in Sri Lanka*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- (1990). 'Economic Liberalisation versus Political Pluralism in Sri Lanka?' *Modern Asian Studies* 24 (2): 341-383.
- Montani, A. (1999). 'On the move: a cultural study of contested space on the east coast of Sri Lanka'. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh.
- Munn, N. D. (1992). 'The cultural anthropology of time: A critical essay'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21: 93-123.
- Nadarajah, T. (1983). 'The transition from higher female to higher male mortality in Sri Lanka' *Population and Development Review* 9: 317-25.
- Narayan, K. (1992). *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Newman, J. (2003). 'Narrating displacement: oral histories of Sri Lankan women' *RSC Working Paper*. No.15. University of Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre.
- Nissan, E., & Stirrat, R.L. (1990). 'The generation of communal identities' in Spencer, J (ed.) *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* London: Routledge: 19-44.
- Nissan, E. (1996). *Sri Lanka: A Bitter Harvest*. Minority Rights Group: London.
- (1998). 'Historical Content'. In *Demanding Sacrifice: War and Negotiation in Sri Lanka*. ACCORD: Conciliation Resources.
- Nordstrom, C. (1994). *Warzones: Cultures of Violence, Militarization and Peace*. Canberra, Australia: Peace Research Centre.
- (1997). *A Different Kind of War Story*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- (1998). 'Terror warfare and the medicine of peace' *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*. 12, 1: 103-121.
- (2002). 'Terror warfare and the medicine of peace'. In C. Batesman (ed.) *Violence: A reader*, edited. New York: Palgrave/Macmillan.
- (2004). *Shadows of Violence (Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nordstrom, C & Martin, J. (1992). *The Paths to Domination, Resistance, and Terror*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nordstrom & Robben. A. C. G. M. (1995). *The Anthropology and Ethnography of Violence and Sociopolitical Conflict*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Obeyesekere, G. N. (1964). *The Natural History of a Land Tenure System*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

- (1974) 'Some Comments on the Social Background of April 1971 Insurgency in Sri Lanka', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 33 (3): 367-384.
- (1978). 'The fire-walkers of Kataragama: the rise of bhakti religiosity in Buddhist Sri Lanka' *Journal of Asian Studies* 37: 457-76.
- Ortner, S. B. (1984). 'Theory in anthropology since the sixties' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26: 126 – 66.
- Orjuela, C. (2003). 'Building peace in Sri Lanka: A role for civil society?' *Journal of Peace Research*, 40(2): 195-212.
- (2004). 'Civil Society in Civil War. Peace Work and Identity Politics in Sri Lanka'. Ph.D Dissertation. Department of Peace and Development Research (Padrigu) Goteborg University, Sweden.
- (2005). 'Dilemmas of civil society aid: donors, NGOs and the quest for peace in Sri Lanka'. *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, 1(1):1-12.
- Otto, D. (1999). 'Subalternity and international law: the problems of global community the incommensurable of difference'. In Darian-Smith, E & Fitzpatrick. P (eds.) *Laws of the Postcolonial*. Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press.
- Peebles, P. (1990). 'Colonization and ethnic conflict in the dry zone of Sri Lanka' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 49(1): 30-55.
- Peel, M. (2000). *Caught in the Middle: A Study of Tamil Torture Survivors Coming to the UK from Sri Lanka*. London: Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture.
- Peiris, G. H. (1981). 'Agrarian transformations in British Sri Lanka' *Sri Lanka Journal of Agrarian Studies* 2(1): 1026.
- Perera, M. (1991). 'Female headed households--a special poverty group.' In *Women, Poverty and Family Survival*. Colombo: CENWOR: 27-64.
- Perera, N. (1999). 'Colonialism and national space: Representations of Sri Lanka'. In Gamage. S., & I. B. Wilson. *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pear of the East' or the 'Island of Tears'?* London: Sage Publications.
- Perera, S. (1995). 'Societies of terror: The absence of a body and the problems of mourning and coping'. In Perera, S. *Living with Torturers And Other Essays of Intervention: Sri Lankan Society, Culture and Politics in Perspective*. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES).
- (1999). *Stories of Survivors – Socio-Political Contexts of Female Headed Households in Post-Terror Southern Sri Lanka (Volume I)*. Colombo: Women's Education and Research Centre.
- (1998). 'Beyond the margins of a failed insurrection: the experiences of women in post-terror Sri Lanka'. *Edinburgh Papers In South Asian Studies* 11: 1-21
- (2001). 'Spirit Possession and Avenging Ghosts: Stories of supernatural activity as narratives of terror and mechanisms of coping and remembering'. In V. Das, A Kleinman, M. Ramphele, M. Lock & P. Reynolds. (eds.) *Remaking a World*. Berkeley: University of California Press .

- Pettigrew, J. (2000). 'Parents and their children in situations of terror: Disappearances and special police activity in Punjab'. In Sluka, J.A. (ed.) *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Peluso, N., & M. Watts. (2001). 'Violent environments'. In N. Peluso & M. Watts (eds.) *Violent Environments*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Peteet, J. (1991). *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*. New York: Colombia University Press.
- Pfaffenberger, B. (1982). *Caste in Tamil Culture: The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka*. Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.
- (1994). 'Introduction: the Sri Lankan Tamils'. In B. Pfaffenberger, & C. Manogaran. (eds.) *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity*. Oxford: Westview Press.
- Phillips, A. (2005). 'The Kinship, marriage and gender experiences of Tamil women in Sri Lanka's tea plantations' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 39: 107-142.
- Pickering, S. (2001) 'Undermining the Sanitized Account Violence and Emotionality in the Field in Northern Ireland' *British Journal of Criminology* 41: 485-501.
- Pirani, C., & A. Kadigamar, (2006) 'Internationalization of Sri Lanka's peace process and governance: A review of strategic conflict assessments'. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 6:1789-1795.
- Punyasena, W. (2003). 'The façade of accountability: disappearances in Sri Lanka'. *Third World Law Review* 23(1): 115-158.
- Rajasingham-Senanayake, D. (1998). 'After victimhood: cultural transformation and women's empowerment in war and displacement' Paper presented at the *Conference on Women in Conflict Zones*. International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo: Sri Lanka.
- (1999). 'After Victimhood: Women's Empowerment in Displacement?'. In Thiruchandran. S. (ed.) *Women, Nation and Narration: Collective Images and Multiple Identities*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishers.
- (2001). 'Ambivalent empowerment midst tragedy of Tamil women in conflict'. In Manchanda, R (ed.). *Women in Conflict*, London: Sage Publications.
- (2004a). 'Between victim and agent: Women's agency in displacement', in P. Essed, G. Frerks & J. Schrijvers. (eds.) *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies: Agency, Ethics and Politics*. Oxford: Berghan Publishers.
- (2004b). 'Between reality and representation women's agency in war and post-conflict Sri Lanka' *Cultural Dynamics*, 16 (2-3):141-168.
- Ramanathapillai, R. (2006). 'The politicizing of trauma: A case study of Sri Lanka'. *Peace and Conflict: A Journal of Peace Psychology*, 12(1): 1-18.

- Reynolds, H. (1980). 'The auspicious married woman' *The Powers of Tamil Women*. Syracuse University, New York: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.
- Reynolds, P (1995). 'Youth and the politics of culture in South Africa' in Stephens. S (ed.) *Children and The Politics of Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rhodes, A. (2005). 'Sri Lanka: Tsunami aid agreement faces mountain of opposition'. *Asia Media. Media news daily*. UCLA Asia Institute.
- Ries, N. (2002). 'Anthropology and the everyday, from comfort to terror', *New Literary History* 33: 725-742.
- Richards, P. (1996). *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*. International Institute Oxford: James Currey.
- Ring, L. A. (2006). *Zenana: Everyday Peace in a Karachi Apartment Building*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Roberts, M. (1974). 'Problems of social stratification and the demarcation of national and local elites in British Ceylon,' *Journal of Asian Studies* 23: 549-77.
- (1996). 'Filial devotion in Tamil culture and the Tiger cult of martyrdom'. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. 30 (2): 245-272.
- (1997). *Sri Lanka. Collective Identities Revisited (Volume I)*. Colombo: Marga Institute.
- (1998). *Sri Lanka. Collective Identities Revisited (Volume II)*. Colombo: Marga Institute.
- Rogers, J.D. (1990). 'Historical images in the British Period' in Spencer, J (eds.) *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* London: Routledge.
- Robben, A.C.G.M., & M.M Suarez-Orozco (2000), (eds.) *Cultures under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rodriguez, H, Wachtendorf, T, Kendra, J., & Trainor, J. (2006) 'A snapshot of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: Social Impacts and Consequences'. *Disaster Prevention and Management*. 15(1): 163-177.
- Ross, F. C. (2003). *Bearing Witness: Women and the South African TRC*. London and New York: Pluto Press.
- Rotberg, R. (1999). 'Sri Lanka's Civil War: From Mayhem toward Diplomatic Resolution'. In Rotberg, R. (ed.). 1999. *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation*. Washington: The World Peace Foundation in association with Bookings Institute Press.
- Rupesinghe, K. (1998), (ed.) *Negotiating Peace in Sri Lanka: Efforts, Failures and Lessons Learnt (Volume One)* (Second Edition) Colombo: Foundation for Co-Existence (FCE).
- (2006), (ed.) *Negotiating Peace in Sri Lanka: Efforts, Failures and Lessons Learnt (Volume Two)*. Colombo: Foundation for Co-Existence (FCE).

- Rusesabagina, P. (2007). *An Ordinary Man: An Autobiography*. London: Penguin Publishers.
- Rushdie, S. (2005 [1981]) 'Introduction', *Midnight's Children*, London: Vintage.
- Ruwanpura, K. N. (2006). *Matrilineal Communities, Patriarchal Realities: A Feminist Nirvana Uncovered*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Ruwanpura, K. N., & Humphries, J. (2004). Mundane heroines: conflict, ethnicity, gender, and female headship in Eastern Sri Lanka'. *Feminist Economics* 10 (2): 173-205.
- Ryan, B. (2004 [1953]). *Caste in Modern Ceylon. The Sinhalese System in Transition*. New Delhi: Navrang.
- Sandywell, B. (2004). 'The myth of everyday life: toward a heterology of the ordinary'. In M. Gardiner & G. E. Seigworth. (eds.), *Rethinking Everyday Life: And Then Nothing Turns Itself Inside Out*, London: Routledge.
- Sachs, H. (1992). *Lectures on Conversation*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Samarasinghe, G., & Galapatti, A. (1998). 'Living in conflict zones, past & present: women and psychosocial suffering' Paper presented at the *Conference on Women in Conflict Zones*. Colombo 11-13<sup>th</sup> December.
- Samaraweera, V. (1997). 'An "act of truth" in a Sinhala court of law: On truth, lies, and judicial proof among the Sinhala Buddhists'. *Cardozo Journal of International and Comparative Law* 5: 133-63.
- Samuel, K. (2006). *A Hidden History: Women's Activism for Peace in Sri Lanka 1982-2002*. Colombo: Social Scientists Association.
- Saravanamuttu, P. (1998). 'Sri Lanka: civil society, the nation and the state-building challenge'. In A. Van Rooy (ed.) *Civil Society and the Aid Industry*. London: Earthscan Publications.
- Scarry, E. (1985). *The Body in Pain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schalk, P. (1992). 'Birds of Independence: On the Participation of Tamil Women in Armed Conflict' *Lanka* 7: 44-142.
- (1994). 'Women fighters of the liberation tigers in Tamil Ilam. The martial feminism of Atel Palacinkam'. *South Asia Research* 14(2): 163.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (1993 [1992]). *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (1995). 'The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology.' *Current Anthropology* 36 (3): 409-440.
- (1996) 'On the call for a militant anthropology—reply' ("white writing"). *Current Anthropology* 37 (2): 344-46.

- (2008). 'A talent for life: reflection on human vulnerability and resilience'. *Ethnos*, 73(1): 25-56.
- Scheper-Hughes. N., & P. Bourgois (2003), (eds.) *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Scheper-Hughes. N., & C. Sargent, (1998), (eds.) *Small Wars: The Cultural Politics of Childhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schutz, A. (1972). *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. London: Heinemann.
- Schilling, D. (2003). 'Everyday Life and the Challenge in Post War France: Braudel, Lefebvre, Certeau'. *Diacritics* 33(1): 23-40.
- Schrijvers, J. (1999). Fighters, victims and survivors: constructions of ethnicity, gender and refugeeeness among Tamils in Sri Lanka' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 12 (3): 307-333.
- Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.
- Scott, W. (1990). 'PTSD in DSM-III: A case in the politics of diagnosis and disease'. *Social Problems*, 37(3): 294-310.
- Segal, L. (1999). *Why feminism? Gender, psychology, politics*. Polity Press: Columbia University Press
- (2000). 'Subject to suspicion: Feminism and Anti-Statism'. *Social Text* 62, 143-151.
- (2008). 'Gender, War and Militarisation: Making and Questioning the Links'. *Feminist Review* 88: 21-35.
- Shanmugam, G. (1999). *A New Beginning: War Widows and their Children*. Colombo: Save the Children (Norway).
- Shanmugaratnam, H. L. (1998). *Rural Poverty in Sri Lanka: A Synthesis of Preliminary Qualitative Studies*. Colombo: World Bank.
- Shukri, M. A. M (1986). 'Muslims of Sri Lanka: A cultural perspective' in Shukari, M. A. M. (ed.) *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*. Beruwalla, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute.
- Sivanandan, A. (1984). 'Sri Lanka: racism and the politics of underdevelopment' in *Race and Class*: 26: 1-37.
- Sivathamby, K (1984). 'Some aspects of the social composition of the Tamils of Sri Lanka'. In *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* Colombo: Social Scientists Association (SSA).
- Skultans, V. (1998). 'Order in narrative experience'. In Skultans, V. *The Testimony of Lives: Narrative and Memory in Post-Soviet Latvia*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Sluka, J. A. (1995) 'Peace process images, symbols and murals in Northern Ireland' *Critique of Anthropology* 16: 381-387.

- (2000). *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Smith, M. E. (1982). 'The process of sociocultural continuity', *Current Anthropology* 23 (2).
- Snodgras, D. R. (1966). *Ceylon: An Export Economy in Transition*. Homewood, III: Richard D. Irwin.
- Somasundaram, D. (1998). *Scarred Minds: The Psychological Impact of War on Sri Lankan Tamils*. London: Sage Publications.
- (2007). Collective trauma in northern Sri Lanka: a qualitative psychosocial-ecological study. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 1 (1): 5.
- Spencer, J. (1990a). 'Introduction: The Power of the Past ' in Spencer, J (ed.) *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* London: Routledge.
- (1990b). 'Writing within: anthropology, nationalism, and culture in Sri Lanka'. *Current Anthropology*. 31 (3): 283-294.
- (1990c). 'Collective violence and everyday practice in Sri Lanka'. *Modern Asian Studies* 24(3): 603-623.
- (1995). 'The past in the present in Sri Lanka. A review article'. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 37 (2): 358-367.
- (2002). 'A nation 'living in different places': Notes on the impossible work of purification in postcolonial Sri Lanka' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 37 (1&2): 1-24.
- (2007). *Anthropology, Politics and the State: Democracy and Violence in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spivak, G. (1988). 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in C. Nelson., & L. Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Sriskandarajah, D. (2004). 'Tamil Diaspora Politics'. In *The Encyclopedia of Diasporas*, New Haven: Yale/Kluwer.
- Stephens, S. (ed.) (1995) *Children and The Politics of Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Stewart, P. J., & Strathern. A (eds.) (2004). *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumours and Gossip*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stirrat, J. (2006) 'Competitive humanitarianism relief and the tsunami in Sri Lanka'. *Anthropology Today*. 22(5): 11-16.
- Suarez-Orozco, M. M. (1990). 'Speaking of the unspeakable: toward A psychosocial understanding towards terror', *Ethos* 18(3): 353-383.
- Swamy, N. (1994). *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Vijitha Yapa.

- Swan, B. (1999). 'Peace: Sri Lanka's impossible dream?' In S. Gamage & I.B. Watson, (eds.). *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the East' or the 'Island of Tears'?* London: Sage Publications.
- Tambiah, S. J. (1958). 'The structure of kinship and its relationship to land possession and residence in Pata Dumbara, Central Ceylon'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 88 (1): 21-44.
- (1973). 'Dowry and bridewealth and the property rights of women in South Asia'. in J. Goody & S. J. Tambiah (eds.) *Bridewealth and Dowry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1986). *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (1990a). 'Introduction'. *Journal of Asian Studies* 49 (1): 26-29.
- (1990b). *Magic, Science and Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1992). *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (1997). *Levelling Crowds. Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Taraki. (1991 [1990]) *The Eluding Peace (An insider's political analysis of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka)*. Paris: ASSEAY.
- Tarlo, E. (2003). *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi*. London: C. Hurst.
- Taussig, M. (1987). *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (1992). *The Nervous System*. New York: Routledge.
- Tennent, Sir James Emerson. (1860) *Ceylon: An Account of the Island*. London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts.
- Thiruchandran, S. (1999) *The Other Victims of War. Emergence of Female Headed Households in Eastern Sri Lanka. Vol. II*. Colombo/New Dehli: WERC and Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD.
- Tiruchelvam, N. (1999). 'Devolution and the elusive quest for peace in Sri Lanka' in Rotberg, R. (ed.). *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation*. Washington: The World Peace Foundation in association with Brookings Institute Press.
- Thangarajah. Y (2003). *Building Local Capacities for Peace*. Colombo: Development Institute, University of Colombo.
- Thiranagama. S. (2005). 'Stories of Home: Generation, Memory, and Displacement among Jaffna Tamils and Jaffna Muslims'. Unpublished PhD. The University of Edinburgh.



- (2007). 'A dream of return' *ISIM Review* 20: 30-31.
- (2009). 'A new morning? Reoccupying home in the aftermath of violence in Sri Lanka'. In Jansen. S & S, Lofving (eds.) *Struggles for Home. Violence, Hope and the Movement of People*. London: Berghahn Books.
- Tonkin, E. (1992). *Narrating Our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trainor, K. (1997). *Relics, Ritual and Representation in Buddhism. Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravāda Tradition*. Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Toulmin, S., & J. Goodfield. (1965). *The Discovery of Time*. London: Hutchinson.
- Trautmann. T. R. (1981). *Dravidian Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1987). *Lewis Henry Morgan and the Invention of Kinship*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Trawick, M. (1992). *Notes on Love in a Tamil family* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (1997). 'Reasons for violence: a preliminary ethnographic account of the LTTE.' *South Asia* 20: 153-80.
- (2002). 'Interviews with High School Students in Eastern Sri Lanka' in D. P. Mines & S. Lamb. *Everyday Life in South Asia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- (2007). *Enemy Lines: Warfare, Childhood, and Play in Batticaloa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Turner, S. (2006). 'Psychiatric help for survivors of torture' *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 6: 295-303.
- UNHCR (2005) *Refugees and Internally Displaced Repatriation and Returns to and within Sri Lanka as at 31 May 2005 Statistical Summary*. Colombo: Sri Lanka.
- Uphoff, N. (1982). 'Contrasting Approaches to water management Development in Sri Lanka' *Third World Legal Studies. Law of Alternative Strategies of Rural Development*. New York: International Third World Legal Studies Association.
- Uyangoda, J. (2003). 'Social Conflict, Radical Resistance, and Projects of State Power in Southern Sri Lanka: The Case of the JVP'. In M. Mayer, D. Rajasingham-Senanayake, & Y. Thangarajah (eds.) *Building local capacities for Peace: Rethinking conflict and development in Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Macmillan.
- Vigh, H. (2008). 'Crisis and chronicity: anthropological perspectives on continuous conflict and decline', *Ethnos*, 73(1): 5-24.
- Vittachi, V. T. (1958). *Emergency '58 – The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots*. London: Andre Deutsch.

- Voloshinov, V. (1986). *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, translated by. L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wadley, S. (ed.) (1980). *The Powers of Tamil Women*. Syracuse University, New York: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.
- Walter, B. (1969). 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. In Arendt, H. *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken.
- Warren K. B (1998). *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Mayan Activism in Guatemala*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Weeden, L. (1999). *Ambiguities of Domination. Politics, Rhetoric, and symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Weerasinghe, R. (1987). *Female-Headed Households in Two Villages in Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Women's Education Centre.
- Wessells, M. (2006). *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- White. H. V. (1987). *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Whitaker, M. P. (1990). 'A compound of many histories: the many pasts of an East Coast community'. In Spencer, J (eds.) *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* London: Routledge.
- (1996). *Amicable Incoherence: Manipulating Histories and Modernities in a Batticaloa Tamil Hindu Temple*, Amsterdam: V.U. University Press.
- (1996). 'Ethnography as Learning: a Wittgensteinian approach to writing ethnographic accounts'. *Anthropological Quarterly* 69 (1): 1-13
- (1999) 'Tigers and Temples: The Politics of Nationalist and Non-modern Violence in Sri Lanka'. In S. Gamage & I.B. Watson, (eds.). *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the East' or the 'Island of Tears'?* London: Sage Publications.
- (2007). *Learning Politics from Sivaram: the Life and Death of a Revolutionary Tamil Journalist in Sri Lanka*. London: Pluto Press.
- (2008). 'Abiding by Sri Lanka Qadri Ismail's way' *Religion* 38: 181-186.
- Wickramasinghe, N. (2001). *Civil Society in Sri Lanka: New Circles of Power*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Wilson, A. J. (1988). *The Break-up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.
- (2000). *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Sydney: C. Hurst & Co.

- Wilson, J., & J. Chandrakanthan. (1998). 'Tamil Identity and Aspirations'. In J. Armon & L. Phillipson (eds.). *Demanding Sacrifice: War and Negotiation in Sri Lanka*. London: ACCORD: Conciliation Resources.
- Wijesinha, R. (1986). *Current Crisis in Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: Navrang.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- (1980). *Philosophical Remarks*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wood, E. (2007). 'Field Research During War: Ethical Dilemmas'. In L. Joseph, M. Mahler & J. Auyero (eds.) *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography*. New York: Springer New York.
- World Bank. (2005). *Rebuilding Sri Lanka: Opportunity in chaos, Tsunami Aftermath Special Report*. Vol.11, Issue 7. Asian Development Bank.
- (2005). 'Sri Lanka Development Forum: The Economy, the tsunami and poverty reduction'. *Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Sector Unit*, South Asia Region. Colombo.
- Wray-Bliss, E. (2005). 'Abstract ethics, embodied ethics: the strange marriage of Marx and Foucault and positivism in labour process theory'. In H. Willmott & C. Grey (eds.) *Critical Management Studies: A Reader*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yalman, N. (1962). 'The Ascetic Buddhist Monks of Ceylon', *Ethnology* 1: 215-328.
- (1967). 'The Raw: the Cooked: Nature: Culture: Observations on Le Cru et le Cuit', in E. Leach (ed.) *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, London: Tavistock Publications.
- (1963). 'On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Malabar and Ceylon', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 93 (1): 25-58.
- (1971 [1967]) *Under the Bo Tree: Studies in Caste, Kinship, and Marriage in the Interior of Ceylon*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Young, A. (1995). *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

## INTERNET SOURCES

- Agreement on a ceasefire Between the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. 2003: [http://www.slmm.info/CEASEFIRE\\_AGREEMENT/Ceasefire\\_Agreement/](http://www.slmm.info/CEASEFIRE_AGREEMENT/Ceasefire_Agreement/). Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009.
- Bajoria, J. (2009). 'The Sri Lankan conflict' Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). New York: <http://www.cfr.org/publication/11407/>. Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December 2009.

- Centre for Information Resources Management (CIRM). (2005) Administrative map of Batticaloa district: District, DS Division, GN Division boundaries: [http://www.ifsp-srilanka.org/html/administrative\\_map\\_batticaloa.html](http://www.ifsp-srilanka.org/html/administrative_map_batticaloa.html). Last accessed 28th November 2009. Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September.
- Department of Census & Statistics (2008) 'Population by ethnic group, census years, Statistical Abstract 2008'.  
[http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Abstract\\_2008\\_PDF/abstract2008/pagesPdf/chapter2.htm](http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Abstract_2008_PDF/abstract2008/pagesPdf/chapter2.htm). Last accessed 13th November 2009.
- Hariharan. R. (2004) 'Karuna in a No-Win Situation' *South Asian Analysis Group* No 1147&8: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers12/paper1165.html>. Last accessed 1st November 2009.
- Jeyaraj, D.B.S. (2002). 'Need for SLMC – LTTE MOU' *Tamil Canadian*:  
[http://www.tamilcanadian.com/northeastern\\_herald/pageview.php?ID=111&SID=39&pr\\_v=ys](http://www.tamilcanadian.com/northeastern_herald/pageview.php?ID=111&SID=39&pr_v=ys)
- Kadirgamar, A. (2003) 'The Violence of Peace' *Lines Magazine*, May 2003:  
[http://www.lines-magazine.org/Art\\_May03/ahilan.htm](http://www.lines-magazine.org/Art_May03/ahilan.htm). Last accessed 1st November 2009.
- Lankanewspaper.com (2007) 'Sri Lankan rupee spiralling down to the bottom'. 20th November 2007: [http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2007/11/21660\\_space](http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2007/11/21660_space). Last accessed September 2009.
- Lankanewspaper.com (2006) 'NGO porn scandal shocks Batti, Ampara.' 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2006:  
<http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2006/4/6567.html>. Last accessed September 2009.
- Map of Sri Lanka. (2007): <http://www.scribd.com/doc/11131/srilanka>. Last accessed 6<sup>th</sup> November 2009.
- Map of Sri Lanka (2009) Report issued by the European Union:  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Extent\\_of\\_territorial\\_control\\_in\\_sri\\_lanka.png#filehistory](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Extent_of_territorial_control_in_sri_lanka.png#filehistory). Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009.
- Ministry of Defence 'Government takes policy decision to abrogate failed CFA'. *MOD*: 2008-01-02. [http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20080102\\_12](http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20080102_12). Last accessed 1<sup>st</sup> February 2008.
- Sambandan, S.V (2005) 'The assassination and after' *Frontline*, 22 (18). August, 27, 2005:  
<http://www.jpp.co.jp/lanka/gov/govr/govre/gov03e.htm>. Last accessed 15th December 2009.
- Sampanthan (2006) 'Tamil youth deliberately killed by security personnel' *Daily Mirror*, 4 January 2006: [www.dailymirror.lk/2006/01/04/news/2.asp](http://www.dailymirror.lk/2006/01/04/news/2.asp). Last Accessed 29th September 2008.
- Sunday Leader (2007) 'President's Tiger deal exposed' 8th July 2007. *The Sunday Leader*:  
<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/20071118/archives.htm>. Last accessed August 2008.

Sunday Times (2005) '400,000 voters to be stripped again', *The Sunday Times* 4th December 2005: <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/051204/index.html>. Last accessed November 2009.

Tamilnet (2006) 'GoSL paying "scant regard" to Norway's peace efforts – LTTE'. 7th August 2006: <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=19111>. Last accessed 13<sup>th</sup> August 2007.

---- (2006) 'Benign parliamentarian from Batticaloa I and II' [http://www.tamilweek.com/Benign\\_parliamrntarian\\_from\\_Batticaloa\\_0108.html](http://www.tamilweek.com/Benign_parliamrntarian_from_Batticaloa_0108.html). Last accessed 5th October 2009.

---- (2006) 'Marginalisation of CFA compels Tamils to resume freedom struggle – LTTE'. 22nd February 2007: <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=21333>. Last accessed 13th November 2009.

Trawick, M. (1990) 'War and Tamil women: A women's eye-view. *Tamil National Forum*: <http://www.tamilnation.org/forum/trawick/90000.htm>. Last accessed September 2008.

The Times (2009) 'Slaughter in Sri Lanka' May 29th, 2009: *The Times Online* [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/leading\\_article/article6382706.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/leading_article/article6382706.ece). Last Accessed 13th November 2009.

Uyangoda, J. (2002) 'Spoiler Dynamics' *Peace Monitor*, 4(3): 17-18: <http://www.cpalanka.org> Last accessed 13th November 2009. [www.flonnet.com/fl2218/stories/20050909006100400.htm](http://www.flonnet.com/fl2218/stories/20050909006100400.htm). Last accessed 19th April 2006.

## Humanitarian Reports

**Agence France-Presse (AFP)**. 'Army deployed as Tamils flee East Sri Lanka amid arson attacks, war fears' 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004: <http://www.reliefweb.int/rwarchive/rwb.nsf/db900sid/>? Last accessed 1<sup>st</sup> December 2009.

**Asian Development Bank (ADB)**, (1999). Country Briefing Paper: Women in Sri Lanka: [http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Country\\_Briefing\\_Papers/Women\\_in\\_SriLanka/default.asp](http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Country_Briefing_Papers/Women_in_SriLanka/default.asp). Last accessed 6th December 2009.

**Amnesty International (AI)**  
[www.amnestyinternational.org](http://www.amnestyinternational.org)

---- (1990a) 'Sri Lanka: An Update on Human Rights' 31st August 1990: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA37/002/1991/en>. Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

---- (1990b) 'Sri Lanka: "disappearances": Father Eugene Herbert, Bertram Francis', 3rd September 1990: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA37/035/1990/en>. Last accessed 3rd October 2009.

---- (1990c) 'Sri Lanka: The Indian Peace Keeping Force and "disappearances"', 31st August 1990: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA37/030/1990/en>. Last accessed 16th October 2009.

---- (2005) 'Sri Lanka: Waiting to go home - the plight of the internally displaced': AI\_LKA\_UPR\_S2\_2008anx\_asa370042006.pdf. Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

---- (2006) Amnesty International Canada 'Sri Lanka: Amnesty International condemns killings of civilians' 16th May: (2006): <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/sri-lanka?page=15>. Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

---- (2007) Sri Lanka Armed Groups Infiltrating Refugee Camps, 14th March 2007: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA37/007/2007>. Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

**British Refugee Council (BRC)** (2002) 'Sri Lanka: Return to Uncertainty', August 2002: [http://www.internaldisplacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/httpCountry\\_Documents?ReadForm&country=Sri%20Lanka&count=10000](http://www.internaldisplacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/httpCountry_Documents?ReadForm&country=Sri%20Lanka&count=10000). Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

**Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers.** (2001) 'Child Soldiers Global Report 2001': 341. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/type,ANNUALREPORT,CSCOAL,LKA,498805cc,0.html>. Last accessed October 11th 2009.

**Council on Foreign Relations (CFR),** (2006), The Sri Lankan Conflict: 11 September 2006: [http://www.cfr.org/publication/11407/sri\\_lankan\\_conflict.html#3](http://www.cfr.org/publication/11407/sri_lankan_conflict.html#3). Last accessed September 2009.

**Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA),** (2006). *Cluster Report April 2006*: Lanka: <http://www.cpalanka.org/page.php?id=0&pubid=343&key=9bdd5f06c37bdab66735ca41a9457925>. Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

---- (2007) *Fact-Finding Visit to Batticaloa*: April 10th & 11th 2007: <http://www.cpalanka.org/page.php?id=0&pubid=341&key=9bdd5f06c37bdab66735ca41a9457925>. Last accessed September 12<sup>th</sup> 2009.

**Forced Migration Organization (FMO)** (2005 [2004]) RESEARCH GUIDE: Sri Lanka. November Sriskandarajah, D: <http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo032/> Last accessed September 2009.

**Inter-Agency Standing Committee Country Team (IASC)**  
<http://ochaonline.un.org/srilanka/SituationReports>

---- (2006a) Situation Report #35 on 25-27 September 2006. Colombo, Sri Lanka: [www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2006.nsf/...iasc-lka.../iasc-lka-27sep.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2006.nsf/...iasc-lka.../iasc-lka-27sep.pdf). Last accessed September 2009.

---- (2006b) Sri Lanka: escalation of conflict leaves tens of thousands of IDPs without Protection and assistance A profile of the internal displacement situation, November 16th 2006: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/assets.nsf/7cf378e8013c9a4880257090004b29cd/8>

[c66e519775d0508c12572270041ee05/\\$FILE/SriLanka\\_overview\\_nov2006.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4523).  
Last accessed September 2009.

**International Crisis Group (ICG)** (2006) 'The Failure of the Peace Process', Asia Report No 124, 28th November 2006: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4523>. Last accessed 24<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

---- (2007) 'Sri Lanka's Human Rights Crisis' Asia Report no 135, June 14, 2007: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4896>. Last accessed September 2009.

**Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)**, (2006) Sri Lanka: escalation of conflict leaves tens of thousands of IDPs without protection and assistance. A profile of the internal displacement situation 16th November 2006.

**IRIN** 'Sri Lanka: IDPs in transit centre face uncertain future', 18th April 2007: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=71682>. Last accessed September 2009.

### **Human Rights Watch Report (HRW)**

<http://hrw.org>

---- (1992). 'Sri Lanka. Stop Killings of Civilians'. Vol. 7, No. 11. May 1992 <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1995/Srilanka.htm>. Last accessed November 2009.

---- (2004). 'Living in Fear: Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka'. Vol. 16, No. 13. November 2004. <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2004/11/10/living-fear>. Last accessed September 2009.

---- (2005) 'Sri Lanka: Child Tsunami Victims Recruited by Tamil Tigers: LTTE May Seek Children to Replace Lost Forces' January 13 2005 <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2005/01/13/sri-lanka-child-tsunami-victims-recruited-tamil-tigers>. Last accessed November 2009.

---- (2006) Funding the "Final War" March 14th 2006: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2006/03/14/funding-final-war-2>: Last accessed November 2009.

---- (2007a) Complicit in Crime: State Collusion in Abductions and Child Recruitment by the Karuna Group. January 2007. 19 (1): <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2007/01/23/complicit-crime>. Last accessed November 2009.

---- (2007b) 'Sri Lanka – Return to War: Human Rights under Siege', vol. 19, no. 11(c). August 2007: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/srilanka0807/1.htm>. Last accessed November 2009.

---- (2007c) 'Sri Lanka: Karuna Group and LTTE continue abducting and recruiting children', 29 March 2007: <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/srilanka0107/>. Last accessed 5th October 2009.

---- (2007d) 'Sri Lanka: IDPs in transit centre face uncertain future', IRIN, 18 April 2007;

---- (2007e) 'Sri Lanka: Civilians who fled fighting are forced to return', Report 16th March 2007: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/srilanka0807/1.htm>. Last accessed 8th October 2009.

---- (2008a) 'Recurring Nightmare: State Responsibility for "Disappearances" and Abductions in Sri Lanka, March 5th 2008. [http://www.hrw.org/en/node/62398/section/6#\\_ftn114](http://www.hrw.org/en/node/62398/section/6#_ftn114). Last accessed 8th October 2009.

---- (2008b) Human Rights Watch press release, "Sri Lanka: Human Rights Situation Deteriorating in the East: Armed Faction is Killing, Kidnapping Civilians," November 24, 2008, available at <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/24/sri-lanka-human-rights-situation-deteriorating-east>. Last accessed 5th October 2009.

---- (2008c) 'Besieged, Displaced, Detained'. 23rd December 2008: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/12/22/besieged-displaced-and-detained-0>, Last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

---- (2009a) 'Sri Lanka: Adopt International Inquiry for Aid Worker Killings. Third Anniversary of ACF Murders Marked by Government Inaction, Intimidation. August 3, 2009. <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/08/03/sri-lanka-adopt-international-inquiry-aid-worker>. Last accessed 8th October.

---- (2009) 'Don't abuse the displaced'. March 9<sup>th</sup> 2009: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/03/09/sri-lanka-don-t-abuse-displaced>. Last accessed 9th December 2009

**Refugee Council (RC).** September 2003, 'Sri Lanka: internally displaced persons and safe returns' September 18th 2003: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/press/2003/september/20030918refug.htm>. Retrieved 11-11-09, Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

**Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM)** Statement 3 January 2008: <http://www.slmm.info/STATEMENTS/2008/>, Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** (2005), 'Sri Lanka: IDP movements by district between January 2002-May 2005ap of internal displacement May 2005. UNHCR: <http://www.internal-displacement.org>. Last accessed 6<sup>th</sup> November 2009

**University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHR)**  
[www.uthr.org](http://www.uthr.org)

#### *Briefings*

---- (1992a) Briefing No. 1 'Human Rights and the Issues of War and Peace'. August 1992.  
Briefing no.2; June 1995.

#### *Bulletins and Statements*



---- (2001) No.26. The Vanishing Young and the silent agony of Sun Set shore (Paduvankarai). 20th Sep 2001: <http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul26.htm>. Last accessed 22nd September 2009.

---- (2005a) Impunity in the Name of Peace: Norway's Appeasement Strategy Claims Another Victim. UTHR Statement: 17th August 2005: <http://www.uthr.org/Statements/Impunity%20in%20the%20name%20of%20Peace.htm>, Last accessed August 15<sup>th</sup> 2009.

---- (2006) No.40. Flight, Displacement and the Two-fold Reign of Terror, 15th June 2006: <http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul40.htm>. Last accessed 15th August 2009.

### *Special reports*

---- (1995) No.6. The Exodus, 6th December 1995: <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport6.htm>. Last accessed 12th September 2009.

---- (1998) No.10. Living through Jaffna's Sultry Sunset. 9th April 1998L: <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport12.htm>. Last accessed 5th August 2009.

---- (1999) No. 12. Gaps in the Krishanthi Kumaraswamy Case. 28th April 1999: <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport12.htm>, Last accessed 16<sup>th</sup> August 2009.

---- (2002) No. 13. Towards A Totalitarian Peace: The Human Rights Dilemma. 10th May 2002. <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport13.htm>, Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

---- (2005) No.19 Defiance, Hope and Betrayal: Times of Sivaram, 9th September 2005: <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport19ptII.htm>. Last accessed 12th September 2009.

---- (2007a) No.24 'The Five Student Case in Trincomalee' 19th April 2007: <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport24.htm>. Last accessed 15th September 2009.

---- (2007b) No.23 From Welikade to Mutur and Pottuvil, 31st May 2007: <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport25.htm>. Last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> August 2009.

---- (2009) No. 33. 'Third Anniversary of the ACF Massacre' 4th August 2009: <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport33.htm>. Last accessed 15th September 2009.

### *Reports*

---- (1989) Report No. 1. January 1989: <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport1.htm>. Last accessed 12th September 2009.

---- (1990) Report No. 3: The War and its Consequences in the Ampara District. Thirunelvely, Jaffna, Sri Lanka:  
<http://www.uthr.org/Reports/Report2/Report2.htm>, Last accessed 9<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

---- (1991) Report No. 8 The Debasement Of Law And Humanity And The Drift Towards Total War (August 1991):  
<http://www.uthr.org/Reports/Report8/Report8.htm>. Last accessed 16th September 2009.

**World Health Organization (WHO)** (2005) Tsunami Situation Report No.38. 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2005.  
[http://www.searo.who.int/LinkFiles/Situation\\_Reports\\_NEWWHO22Feb2005.pdf](http://www.searo.who.int/LinkFiles/Situation_Reports_NEWWHO22Feb2005.pdf):  
Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

**Women and Media Collective (WMC)** Sri Lanka: Statement - defend women's right to work. 5th October 2006: <http://www.wluml.org/node/2953>: Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

